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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

FEBRUARY 5, 1996

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CORRESPONDENCE

Race, crime

To the editors:

I would like to compliment you on the forthright work of your authors who have been able to cut through the overblown rhetoric surrounding race and crime (White Lies, Black Lives, January 1). As a law enforcement officer who works in one of the poorest cities in the nation I share the view of your authors that racism still exists in the criminal justice process. But this does not change the reality that black and brown fingers are on the triggers of the guns mowing down the young African American and Hispanic teenagers on the streets of my city.

The leaders of the African American and Hispanic communities must face the fact that painting all members of law enforcement as racists will do nothing to make their communities safer places to live. No matter how open-minded an officer is, if the community refuses to assist the officer as he or she attempts to solve or prevent acts of violent crime, there is a real potential for police viewing the members of that community with a cynical eye.

Society at large must bear a burden in providing some relief and hope for these communities overwhelmed by crime and poverty. However, the only significant resource we have poured into these communities has been money for police and jails. What does it say about us as a nation when the only hope we offer our poor urban youth for free medical care, a safe place to sleep, adequate nourishment and an opportunity for education is behind the shiny razor wire of a multi-million-dollar prison?

MATTHEW HENNESSY
Hartford, Connecticut

To the editors:

I share a basic proposition underlying Randall Kennedy's article "Is Everything Race?" (January 1). Namely, that the oppositionary posture toward racism by those of us on the liberal and left-wing side of the political spectrum should always have its temperature measured for the right degree of pragmatism and realism. Thus, when this oppositionary posture is overheated, this means it fails the pragmatic-realism test and must be corrected. Of course, the rub comes when one has to decide that precise point on the thermometer at which a given oppositionary posture to America's white-supremacist pariahization of black folks is designated as overheated.

At this juncture, Kennedy and I part ways. Racist values do indeed shape the fact that over 90 percent of those convicted for crack violations are African Americans, though African Americans comprise only one-third of convictions for powder cocaine violations.

Kennedy's point of vision on the American system offers some explanation—a kind of establishmentarian liberal vision. In this vision, the American system's social and power dimensions, like its economic dimensions, are intrinsically self-corrective, self-healing, though (and this is the liberal component) they need a little nudge too, a little push by activists of one mode or another. But the little nudge must be careful always, serene in its tenderness toward the American system, for there's that overriding concern of not overheating the contest and thereby distorting the resolution. For Kennedy: "Once a dispute becomes framed as a matter of fundamental racial justice, considerations of personal honor and public reputation elevate the stakes and polarize the antagonists.... Once a charge of racism is lodged, it tends to dominate other concerns."

Here, Kennedy is both right and wrong. Yes, packaging the stark discrepancy in crack/powder cocaine convictions as a matter of fundamental racial justice does sharpen the policy contest. But he is wrong in his view that some kind of moral invisible hand (like the invisible hand in our economy) will correct this kind of racial injustice. We have no evidence that the persistent patterns of pariahizing African Americans—marginalizing and victimizing their life chances—will be better understood and thus altered by not labeling them for what they are: racist.

MARTIN KILSON
Cambridge, Massachusetts

To the editors:

Randall Kennedy concludes his otherwise thoughtful article on crime with this assertion: "There is, of course, a race problem in the administration of criminal justice—a big one. But that problem resides not in race-neutral legislation such as the crack law, *but rather in laws and practices that purposefully treat blacks different from whites.*" (Emphasis added.)

Not only does Kennedy fail to cite any evidence to support this assertion, he does not even tell us which "laws and practices" he has in mind. Apparently, Kennedy views this assertion as so self-evident, no further explanation is needed.

Based upon my twenty-five years in the criminal justice system in various capacities, I reject totally Kennedy's assertion. Interestingly, the very next article in that TNR ("The Impossible Dilemma" by Glenn Loury) contains the following: "The racial disparity in prison populations has increased sharply in recent years, despite the fact (as nearly all experts agree) that blacks are not sentenced more severely than whites who have been convicted of the same crime."

ROBERT STEIGMANN
Urbana, Illinois

To the editors:

I was struck by the opening of Debra Dickerson's poignant piece ("Who Shot Johnny?" January 1) in which she states that she is an "unrepentant and vocal" advocate of affirmative action. Surely there is some connection between her own embrace of victim status, her willingness to accept a benefit solely based on skin color and the attitudes she so scathingly denounces in her nephew's attacker. The trigger-happy lowlife who shot Johnny may be uneducated and semi-literate, but it's a mistake to assume that he's a fool. He and his cohorts who terrorize black neighborhoods across America must be aware (if indirectly) of the ongoing debate on racial particularity. The claims made by white liberals and black intellectuals that buttress the system of "affirmative action" can only encourage these violent men to view themselves as helpless victims, deprived of what's rightfully theirs, entitled to special consideration and perforce outside the moral structure within which the rest of us try to live.

The first step toward taking responsibility for one's own life is to view oneself as an individual, free to choose the course of that life. How can a system which defines all black Americans—including hard-working, respectable, middle-class black Americans—as inevitably downtrodden, contribute to the sense of personal worth of the sorriest and most hopeless?

JONATHAN TAYLOR
West Newton, Massachusetts

To the editors:

In "Who Shot Johnny?" Debra Dickerson's parting shot at Johnny's attacker, "You can't do anything right, can you?" comes off as just another angry black woman stripping the last shreds of self-esteem from another angry black man. That, perhaps, is the fundamental problem of the black community.

GLENN BASSETT
Lyme, Connecticut

Flexible

To the editors:

Cushing Strout (Correspondence, January 22) accuses me of editing William James "to a more contemporary taste"

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(what a wealth of innuendo in that phrase!) by saying that his pragmatism does not require us to square a new belief with every other belief we once found useful, and that it is not opposed to monism and idealism. James did think that people try to make new data compatible with old truths. But there is nothing philosophical, in the traditional sense, about this essentially adaptive behavior since the "cash value" of the new belief comes first and the squaring second, and it was obviously the traditional philosophical sense that I was talking about. And although James was himself a pluralist, he insisted that pragmatism does not rule out monism and idealism, only tries to make them "flexible." Strout has fallen into the error of treating Jamesian pragmatism as a philosophy, when James intended it only as a way of doing philosophy.

Vincent Nemeti, in the same issue, calls my statement that James's grandfather purchased the village of Syracuse outright in 1824 "totally false" and "balderdash pure and simple." My source was R. W. B. Lewis's *The Jameses*, which states that "in May 1824" James "quite literally bought the village of Syracuse." The grounds of Nemeti's outrage turn out to be (1) Syracuse was not incorporated until 1825, and (2) James's purchase was made through a corporate entity. The first is utterly pedantic: Lewis and I didn't write "the Village of Syracuse." There must have been something there in 1824 to incorporate in 1825; what would Nemeti like us to call it? The proto-village of Syracuse? On the second point, Lewis and Alfred Habegger, in *The Father*, explain that James was the majority and sole active partner in the corporation, which purchased the only tract of privately owned land in the area. I refer Nemeti to those works for further details and resent the peevishness of his accusation.

Someone who had good reason to send in a righteous letter about my review, but kindly refrained, is Jean Strouse, whose description of Mary James I mistranscribed as "tyrannical selfishness." What Strouse wrote was "tyrannical selflessness," a wonderfully Jamesian phrase that captures in two words something I struggled for many more to say.

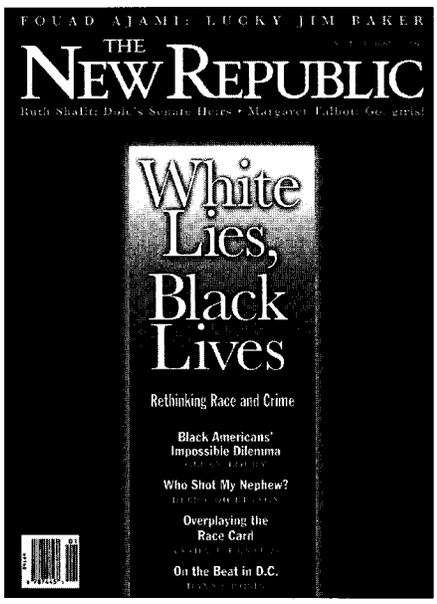
LOUIS MENAND
New York, New York

Wright on Wright

To the editors:

Without taking anything away from Robert Wright's keen dissection ("Speaker's Corner," January 1) of House Speakers Jim Wright and Newt Gingrich's venalities, the former's 55 percent royalty was neither unorthodox nor unheard of. Unfortunately, virtually every reporter, not to mention Special Counsel Richard Phelan, has pounced on the 55 percent rate as if it were a heinous crime. In fact, Wright's royalty rate is much more common than Gingrich's original $4.5 million dollar book deal. (If you want a crime, Gingrich was offered $4.5 million based on a book proposal his accomplices claimed he neither wrote nor even saw.)

Wright's book was self-published. Self-publishing is a literary demi-monde that incubates thousands of volumes in America annually. Granted, a lot of them are disagreeable poetry, quaint genealogical treatises and ruminations on the end of the world as the author sees it. Few land at your neighborhood Borders or are reviewed in the pages of TNR, but, no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matter, they are a legitimate species. More importantly, the "royalty" rate to the author of self-published books is normally around 50 percent because the author is, in effect, also the publisher. The author pockets the difference between the printing costs and the sales price.

Wright's real sin was flogging his book in bulk to lobbyists and others with an interest in legislation. Gingrich, whose literary agent must have been Willie Sutton, went Wright one better. He sold a book proposal to a subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch, a man with an enormous interest in legislation, a $4.5 million interest.

DANIEL BUCK
Washington, D.C.

Re-tread Republicans

To the editors:

"The Deal" by Matthew Cooper and Freshman Funds in Notebook (January 1) point out that three freshman GOP representatives who have pounded the most on family values (Enid Waldholtz of Utah, Jim Bunn from Oregon and Jon Christiansen of Nebraska) all filed for divorce this year. While divorce in Congress is hardly a partisan issue it is a lot more serious for the GOP if they are really planning to run on social issues. Divorce is one thing; how it is perceived and handled is another. The current GOP leadership make the GOP freshmen look good.

Senator Gramm got married when he was working on his Ph.D., and his wife helped him through grad school. After Gramm completed his Ph.D. and was a professor at Texas A&M he did a careful cost-benefit analysis of his career, jettisoned his wife and married a young professor of economics. Gramm than entered politics.

Senator Dole is a story right out of *A Farewell to Arms*. He married a nurse he met in the hospital while recuperating from wounds suffered in World War II. Hemingway's World War I officer never marries the nurse who cared for him in an Italian hospital, but he is at her side when she dies. The pragmatic Dole veers from the plot line here and marries Elizabeth Dole, a younger woman of great political savvy.

Newt Gingrich's first wife put him through grad school and after he was elected to Congress, Gingrich married a younger, more energetic woman.

Is there a common thread here? The GOP spent many years overcoming the legacy of Richard Nixon posters that said "Would you buy a used car from this man?" Now from the senior Senator Strom Thurmond to the freshman class in the House their poster says "Trade in, trade up."

LARRY ARMSTRONG
Spokane, Washington

Fathomless

To the editors:

I'm curious (to put it mildly) what Helen Vendler ("Unfathomable Life," January 1) means by "In a time when it is being metaphysically denied that there are human universals...." Is this perhaps a confused reading of philosophers, like Sartre, who deny that there is "human nature" (meaning, roughly, an ahistorically correct way to live), or is it the idea that no one is constrained to do "evil" that constitutes this metaphysical denial? You'll understand if I doubt that anyone is really denying, as Vendler implies, that all humans have breakable bones, "a good supply of teeth and fingernails," and so on.

DAVID SWANSON
Palmyra, Virginia

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FROM WASHINGTON

Cheers!

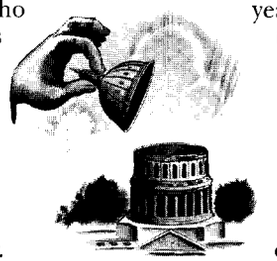
> Newt Gingrich took the Capital by storm today like many of the generals he has studied—before dawn, with a plan and with an eye on history.
>
> —*The New York Times*, January 1995

It is important not to let life's special moments pass without celebration. Certainly the Republicans didn't make this mistake a year ago, when they took control of Congress for the first time in four decades. They held champagne parties in committee rooms, invited the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers to the Capitol steps and chanted "Newt, Newt, Newt" as the new Speaker convened the 104th Congress with a specially made oversized gavel. Well, it's January again. Feeling festive? Me too. But it looks like the theme of the celebration will be different this time around. A year after Gingrich set out to take this town by storm, his revolution has gotten more thoroughly bogged down than even the optimists among us had dared hope.

It would be easy to forget how good things looked for Gingrich and the Republicans as 1995 began. After all, public dislike of Gingrich has now become such a constant that pollsters can use it to test the accuracy of their equipment. Gingrich's publisher has discounted his book in hopes of freeing up a few acres of warehouse space. The Republicans' budget showdown with President Clinton has brought them ever-lower esteem. And Gingrich's mouth has played such a large role in this debacle that a couple of months ago leading Republicans took the Speaker aside and asked him to speak less often. Still, it's true: there actually was a moment early last year when Gingrich stood astride the world. The question on Washington's mind was whether he would be remembered mainly as the leader of a revolution in Congress or whether, instead, he'd choose to occupy the White House and guide the currents of history from there.

Misfortune per se does not warrant sustained revelry. If Gingrich and his revolutionaries had just run into bad luck—been lost in the recent snowstorm and never heard from again, say—then only a brief and decorous celebration would be in order. What gives liberals an excuse to don their togas and debauch until sunrise is the source of the Republicans' problems: Gingrich's own snivelling nastiness and the essential dishonesty of his enterprise.

Remember the Contract with America? It promised voters: we'll cut taxes, boost defense spending and balance the budget—all without sacrifice from you. To the shock and horror of liberal commentators, voters replied: Hey, why didn't the Democrats think of that? We commentators, after recovering from the ensuing depression, began gamely predicting that the Contract's contradictions would eventually catch up with Republicans. And—who would have dreamed?—this actually happened. By late last year it had become clear that to both cut taxes and balance the budget, you really do have to ask for sacrifice—so much sacrifice, in fact, that you can't extract it all from the poor. (Among the annoying characteristics of poor people, Republicans have discovered, is that they don't have much money.)



Let's skip the tired Jesuitical discussion of whether reducing previously projected spending on Medicare (and Medicaid, etc.) really qualifies as "cutting." The core point is this: under the Republican plan, Medicare patients will get skimpier care than they would if it weren't for a tax cut that will mainly help upper-class people. It is the ugly irreducibility of this fact that has got the Republicans in their current rut. And Gingrich knows it. That's why he's trying to focus attention elsewhere—lately, back on the tired Jesuitical discussion of what is and isn't a "cut." When Clinton used that word repeatedly in a recent press conference, Gingrich went on a rampage, calling the president "factually challenged."

The Speaker conducted this performance in the distinctively bratty tone that Americans so manifestly dislike. ("*Eight times* in today's press conference the president misled the American people about Medicare and Medicaid. I wrote them down.... How can you explain it when the president of the United States in one press conference is factually wrong *eight times*?") This brings to mind another cause for celebration: Gingrich, as he himself might put it, *just doesn't get it.* A year ago it seemed eerily possible that this street brawler might get a makeover for his new role as historic figure: affect an air of Victorian civility and gracefully consolidate the power he had thuggishly won. But it soon became evident that Gingrich either didn't understand the need for such a ruse or literally isn't capable of the requisite self-control. During his first day in office, he accused Democrats of using "a fairly stupid strategy" and "a pathetically narrow, partisan gimmick" and being "cheap and nasty." Music to my ears.

Meanwhile, his shock troops are turning out to be even less coachable than he. A recent PBS documentary on Gingrich reminds us how thoroughly he had molded many congressional freshmen in his own image. They had studied his two-columned lists of *(a)* adjectives to affix to liberals and *(b)* adjectives to affix to conservatives. They had listened to his instructional cassettes. Then, a year ago, the time finally came to send in the clones. But—whoops!—there was one part of the Gingrich sensibility he had failed to program into them: cynicism. Some of these people really *were* true believers. When the time came to compromise on the budget, they wouldn't let him.

They may suffer from the illusion that the 1994 election was an unambiguous conservative mandate. In truth, what they rode to power was partly alienation; there was undeniably an anti-liberal flavor, but there was also a dollop of pure anti-incumbent sentiment. Now, in their recalcitrance, the young Republicans are creating a spectacle of government incompetence that will expand the latter and subdue the former. Trouble is, once you've got control of Congress, an anti-incumbent strategy loses some of its logic.

None of this is to say that either the state of the union or the state of the Democratic Party is cause for joy. Suddenly thrust into the minority, some Democrats have assumed nearly as hysterical a tone as Gingrich did when he was in their shoes. There has indeed been too much cheap populist denunciation of "cuts" and not enough serious grappling with the budget. Still, however circuitous his route, President Clinton has finally produced a serious plan to balance the budget. And, stunningly, it's a plan that could actually sustain popular support—thanks largely to the way Republicans have blundered into the role of bad cop. It will truly be sad if this historic moment isn't seized. Still, there will at least be the consolation of watching Republicans suffer for the failure. So let's raise a glass, shall we? It isn't every day that poetic justice visits Washington.

ROBERT WRIGHT

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

FEBRUARY 5, 1996

THE ANSWER

As we enter another round of budget brawling, we'd like to remind the combatants that the answer to their problem is out there. It isn't perfect; but it's far preferable to either Clinton's or the GOP's dream budget; and far, far better than a stand-off till November. It comes from the twenty-one Democrats called the Blue Dogs, or the Coalition. On almost all the central issues, their plan makes sense to us. Here's how simple it is:

Tax cuts: None. Zero. Bowing to the obvious truth that you can't have it all ways, the Coalition avoids the Republicans' gift to the wealthy in the form of a capital gains tax cut, as well as the less offensive, but still unnecessary, Clintonian middle-class tax cut. The Coalition budget even, in a tiny way, raises taxes by lowering the Consumer Price Index. The CPI adjusts inflation, used to raise tax brackets and Social Security benefits. By lowering the adjustment, payments stay more static, but the small hit is spread diffusely and evenly.

Medicare: Clinton's demagoguing on this has been truly rebarbative. But the disproportionate emphasis on it among the Republicans, given their tax cuts for the rich, is at least as noxious. So why not split the difference? The Coalition cuts $163 billion, and does it the fair way, by raising premiums on more affluent beneficiaries. Already, their numbers have been a magnet for both sides. The Republicans now cut $168 billion, down from $184 billion. And Clinton has inched up to $125 billion from $102 billion.

Social welfare: Here's where the philosophical differences between the Coalition and Republicans get deeper. The Blue Dogs wisely leave policy upheavals like entitlements and block grants for another debate and just make the cuts. They cut Medicaid more than the White House but preserve its entitlement status. They cut welfare more but leave it with the federal government. The Coalition also preserves one of Washington's best anti-poverty programs, the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Yes, there's plenty about the Coalition budget we don't like. While the Coalition is deaf to the pleas of traditional Democratic constituencies, like unions, they are more friendly to big business. Blue Dogs only cut corporate tax loopholes by $29 billion, half Clinton's admirable, bolder cut. And they couldn't restrain themselves from sneaking some tasty treats into their own backyard: their budget preserves the arcane system of agricultural subsidies. But compared to the Republicans' pork, these are mere kibbles: for the oil companies, the GOP plan allows drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. For banks, there's the guaranteed student loan system, which reaps them a huge profit and eliminates competition at public expense. And for all other businesses, there's permission to withdraw billions from employee pensions and future capital gains tax cuts. All told, the GOP budget looks like it was intended not to impose fiscal discipline but to tilt the burdens of government to the poor and the benefits to the rich. If there is to be a compromise, this has got to change.

Most important, the Coalition budget is free of gimmicks. Take discretionary spending. All three budgets cut this general operating budget, which pays for everything from the Coast Guard to the IRS to roads and schools. This part of the budget is easy to cut, since we won't know until the future what exactly will be sliced, and, unlike entitlements, it has no organized constituency. People are more likely to know that Uncle Sam is mailing them a check than repairing a road they drive on. But the Republican budget cuts $91 billion, an impossible sum. And while Clinton's budget cuts less, it saves the biggest hit for the seventh year, when people will be unprepared. The Coalition budget cuts slightly more than Clinton's but spaces it evenly over seven years. This is a crucial aspect of fiscal honesty: the Coalition budget hacks a larger chunk every year for seven years, for a total of $500 billion. The other two budgets save only $300 billion and rely on seventh-year tricks. Clinton makes up the difference with the last-minute cuts. And for Republicans, the extra savings are either temporary, like the final-year rush to pay capital gains tax, or completely phony. Balancing the budget in seven years isn't so hard. What the Blue Dogs pull off is a plan more likely to stay balanced in eight years, or twenty.

At the end of the last round, Republicans announced they would reach out to the Blue Dogs. Democrats have already met them halfway: Clinton has strongly hinted he'd be willing to abandon his tax cut in a heartbeat. And congressional Democrats have lined up the votes to pass the Coalition budget. Now it's up to Republicans. What they do will prove whether they're really interested in balancing the budget or just in rewarding their friends. If Bob Dole really wants to prove his statesmanship, this is where he should start. •

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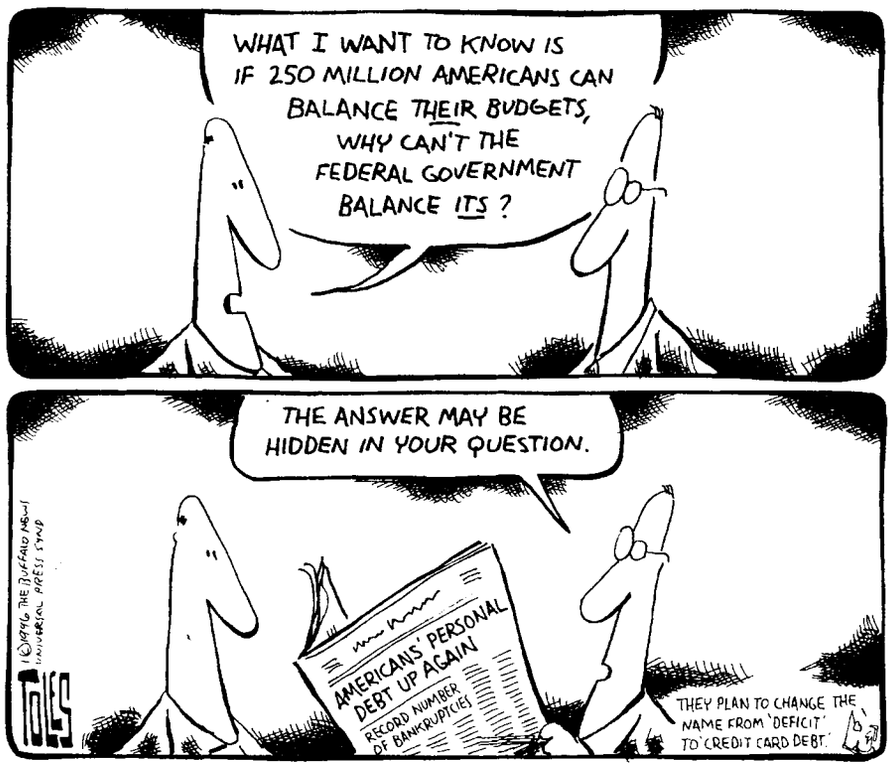
NOTEBOOK

SIC TRANSIT: Lee Brown, the nation's outgoing drug czar, asked Adidas to discontinue its "Hemp" shoe line.... Phil Gramm, speaking at a forum for gun owners, bragged about his wife's pistol-shooting acumen and warned that "Mama's got a .38 Special, and she knows how to use it." ... Prince Charles's line of American foodstuffs will soon include herb cheeses, herbal soft drinks and orange cookies.... A Dallas supermarket clerk was fired for wearing a Green Bay Packers jersey to work on the day of the Dallas Cowboys' playoff game against the Packers.... Explaining his allegiance to the Republican Party, Representative Sonny Bono remarked that every time he deals with Democrats, "I feel like I have been kicked in the head," to which Democratic Representative Melvin Watt responded, "I just want the gentleman to know that there are a lot of people on this side who agree that you have been kicked in the head."


WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS IF 250 MILLION AMERICANS CAN BALANCE THEIR BUDGETS, WHY CAN'T THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BALANCE ITS ?
THE ANSWER MAY BE HIDDEN IN YOUR QUESTION.
AMERICANS' PERSONAL DEBT UP AGAIN
RECORD NUMBER OF BANKRUPTCIES
THEY PLAN TO CHANGE THE NAME FROM 'DEFICIT' TO 'CREDIT CARD DEBT'
TOLES

THEY'RE OFF!: Even more than most of its kind, last week's Iowa Republican presidential debate was a disheartening exercise in vacuity. Iowans submitted admirably substantive questions. Too bad about the answers. How would Pat Buchanan balance the budget? Kill foreign aid, Pat Schroeder's pension and the Education Department. How to address America's racial divide? Steve Forbes knew: with a flat tax! One concerned Iowan wondered whether social spending could be saved by ditching tax cuts and B-2 bombers. "The answer to that is no," says Lamar Alexander, who, rather than elaborating, announced that he had released his tax returns and so should Forbes. And when a worried high-schooler asked about the future of student loans, Phil Gramm gave a perfunctory non-answer before implicating Bob Dole in "a secret deal [he's] cutting with Bill Clinton" over the budget. Almost makes us wish we'd caught C-SPAN's re-enactment of the Lincoln-Douglas debates.

AMAZING GAP: According to the author's biography in his latest book, *Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation*, the best-selling social critic Jonathan Kozol has enjoyed an illustrious career writing only volumes of profundity ever since his first exercise in social criticism, *Death at an Early Age*. Well, not quite. Inconveniently for Kozol, his first book was actually a slim, squirmingly embarrassing novel, *The Fume of Poppies*, published in 1958, when Kozol was 21 and fresh out of Harvard—the torrid story of "the tenderness of young love discovering itself, wondering at itself." Its hero, an earnest young Harvardite and his blond, blue-eyed girlfriend fornicate their way across Europe and say things like, "There is a perfume about you, Wendy," and "Darling, take off your trousers.... Let me love you." A representative sample:

> Now as I looked at Wendy, and at the rushing rise of her two full breasts, and the flooding fear and hope in her eyes, I began to realize what it means to make love. When you make love, you make your love for a while. You are molding it by what you are doing; you are forming it in your fingers and pressing it between your limbs. In the ache of every muscle of your body and the death of every other thought, in the straining cling of two lovers' arms together and the wet locking of their fingers in the night—their love is born at last.

The Fume of Poppies mysteriously disappeared from Kozol's bibliography after the 1967 publication of *Death at an Early Age*. The transgressions of youth are pardonable, of course (more pardonable surely than his 1978 ode to Fidel Castro, *Children of the Revolution*, which hails Fidel's literacy programs as a "pedagogical victory unheralded in the modern world"), except that Kozol has made a career of his immunity to transgression. This is what he told *The New York Observer* recently: "I'm far more scared in Manhattan [than in the South Bronx, the setting of his new book], because that's

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when I feel my soul is in peril, when I have to go to the Four Seasons." He dined for our sins.

LITTLE RASCALS:

Infant morality in U.S. falls to all-time low

—*The San Francisco Examiner,* December 13, 1995.

SPEAK NO EVIL: As predicted two weeks ago in these pages (see "Gotcha II," by James J. Cramer, TNR, January 8 and 15), Fidelity Investments has instituted a gag order on all its portfolio managers to avoid possible conflicts regarding the buying and selling of securities. So now instead of the limited disclosure currently available about mutual funds' managers views on stocks, we'll have no current information at all. Good work, business journalists; the information that readers, stock-owners and editors need is now increasingly unavailable. You've scared everybody into keeping their mouths shut.

RESEARCH NEWS:

Police find less tolerance lowers crime

—*Atlanta Constitution,* January 8, 1996.

Study Finds Sex, Pregnancy Link

—*Cornell Daily Sun,* December 7, 1995.

Obese should make diet top goal, study says

—*Columbus Dispatch,* December 27, 1995.

(Thanks to Cosima Lyttle of Decatur, Georgia, Aaron Tax of Ithaca, New York, and James Baughman of Madison, Wisconsin.)

JUST YOU WAIT TILL STROM THURMOND GETS DRAFTED: "I have more progeny than all the rest put together. I have more military experience than anybody here."—Bob Dornan, in the Iowa debate, January 13.

IS DICK MORRIS IN MOSCOW?: Boris Yeltsin's post-recuperation purge of reformers, his assault on the town of Pervomaskoye and now his firing of Anatoly Chubais, the deputy prime minister, all point to an overwhelming conclusion: Yeltsin is running for re-election. It's a sign of the increasingly revanchist climate of Russian public opinion that doomed, vicious attacks on civilians do not seem to be damaging Yeltsin's chances for a comeback. And the "triangulation" strategy is now clear: slow down the pace of economic reform by firing Chubais; outflank Russian nationalists by firing Kozyrev; and reassert presidential authority by using an "iron fist" to crush Chechen rebels. And yet all the while, Moscow did not seem to have completely reversed its gradual gains in controlling inflation and was keen to reassure representatives of the IMF this week that it was not about to turn the fiscal spigots on. At this moment, too, Russian troops are cooperating with NATO in the American sector of temporarily pacified Bosnia. Yeltsin is as able to square political circles as Bill Clinton. His political ambition, however, is less elevated. It is merely to survive the first round of voting in the presidential ballot. If the last Duma elections are any sign, the nationalist Zhirinovsky and communist Zyuganov will enter the run-off. If that happens, we may look back on Boris Yeltsin's latest incarnation with some longing.

IN CASE YOU HADN'T NOTICED: Senior editor Michael Lewis's hilarious report from Iowa on Morry Taylor's campaign this week is the second in what will be a regular feature throughout the 1996 campaign. You can expect them most weeks till November. •

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HABSBURGISM

By Charles Lane

> People of Bosnia and Herzegovina! The Army of the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary has crossed the frontier of your country. It does not come as an enemy to take the land by force. It comes as a friend to put an end to the disorders....
> —Austro-Hungarian troops announcing the Habsburg protectorate over Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878, from *The Bridge on the Drina*, by Ivo Andrić

Thus began the last full-blown exercise in multinational peacekeeping in Bosnia. The Dual Monarchy didn't waffle about neutrality among the parties. "All those who behave themselves will be protected," declared the Austrian colonel in Andrić's epic. "Peace and order must be maintained everywhere. It must be, whether they like it or not." And Austria-Hungary didn't worry about mission creep or exit strategies. Its soldiers, bureaucrats and businessmen introduced everything from flush toilets and railroads to police and courts. Peace and prosperity lasted until Russian-backed intrigues aroused Bosnian Serb sentiment against the empire, leading to Austria's disastrous 1908 annexation and, then, World War I. But until then, Bosnia had enjoyed a virtual golden age of modernization.

Now American troops and tanks have rumbled over the new bridge on the Sava River, just as Franz-Josef's steeds pranced over the bridge on the Drina 118 years ago. This American-led NATO protectorate, sanctioned by a modern-day Congress of Berlin at Dayton, is, like Franz-Josef's mission, couched in humanitarian terms. Like the Austrian expedition, though, its primary purpose is to restore order in Europe's underbelly.

But there is a difference. The threat in Bosnia to the King-Emperor's interests was clear and present. Vienna, Andrić wrote, could no longer tolerate "violence and disorder" and "misery and misfortune" in Bosnia because Bosnia stood "at the frontiers of his lands." America's frontiers, by contrast, are nowhere near Bosnia; so the Clinton administration stands accused of risking U.S. troops for a small, peripheral country. The mission is moralism—"foreign policy as social work," says Michael Mandelbaum of Johns Hopkins University in a recent *Foreign Affairs* opus. Or it is aggrandizement—the prelude to a "Third American Empire" described by my colleagues Michael Lind and Jacob Heilbrunn in *The New York Times*.

Then again, sometimes the stakes really are the highest in small, peripheral places. Can a case be made that repairing Bosnia serves historic American interests, not just protean American values? I think it can—though admittedly the Clinton administration has not been good at articulating what is necessarily a long-term, even farsighted, argument. Partly this is because the administration prefers self-congratulatory moralistic rhetoric. And partly it is just impolitic to talk with appropriate bluntness about what a flop united Europe has turned out to be.

Why are we in Bosnia? You might as well ask why we are still in Europe, a continent with ancient, but so far unfulfilled, pretensions toward peaceful self-rule. Three times this century, powers deemed hostile to the U.S. have attempted to exploit Europe's chronic divisions to gain hegemony over the continent: Kaiser Wilhelm's Germany, Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union. Each time, many urged the U.S. to stay out of the quarrel. Each time, however, the economic and political repercussions of permitting hostile domination of the other shore of the Atlantic outweighed the costs of intervention.

While all of these American military efforts carried a moral component, none would have been undertaken solely for moral, as opposed to prudential and geopolitical, reasons. If there had been a true anti-fascist consensus in the United States before Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt might have succeeded in joining the fight in Europe before Hitler's declaration of war. If the cold war had simply been a crusade to roll back, rather than contain, Soviet tyranny, Eisenhower would not have tolerated Moscow's invasion of Hungary in 1956.

And if the Clinton administration had really wanted to stop genocide in Bosnia, the time to have done that was four years ago. Mandelbaum criticizes Clinton both for threatening to bomb Bosnia to stop the suffering of its people at the hands of the Serbs and then for not fulfilling the threat because it lacked popular and allied support. The real reason Clinton didn't bomb is that, like George Bush before him, he was inclined (not to say desperate) to believe that post-cold war Europe could, and should, handle its own security. The fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, which discredited the Anglo-French U.N. peacekeeping mission, demonstrated that this hope was premature. Our restraint wasn't really doing "the allies" much of a favor.

To be sure, the U.S. is not acting now to stop a hostile power from taking over Europe. Serbia is not the Third Reich. And the scenario under which the war spreads "like a brush fire" to Albania, Greece, Turkey and God knows where has always been pretty farfetched. Nevertheless, the war in Bosnia has destabilized Europe in subtle but far-reaching ways. Before the war, Europe was preparing to enjoy an historically rare moment of power-sharing, mediated by organizations such as NATO and the European Union. These multilateral groupings, for all their flaws, promised an end to the great-power competition that led Europe, and the Americans, into

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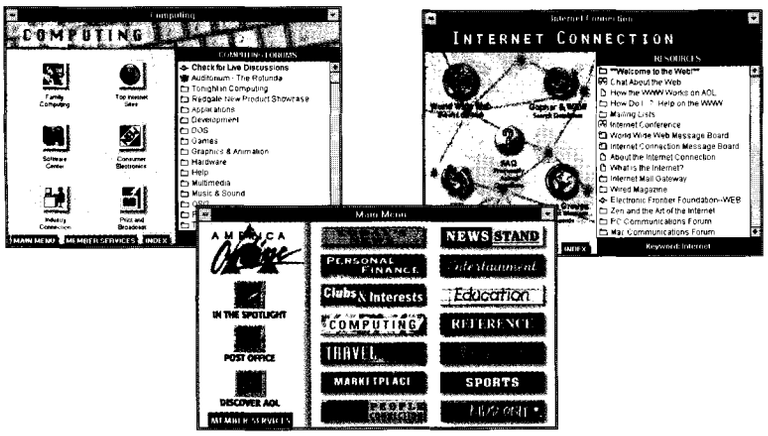

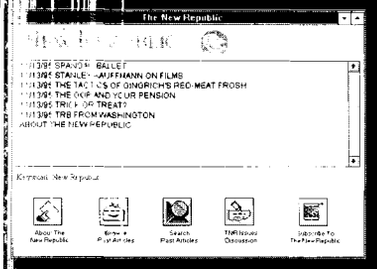

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war so many times in the past.

But nationalistic war in the Balkans threatens European "values" and the Euro-order upon which they are based. Partly this is because each major European state has its own historically determined sympathies and enmities in the Balkan fray and hence its own ideas on how to solve, or exploit, the problem. Partly it is because the inability of Europe to end the war suggests ominously that nothing else can be accomplished through cooperation. ("When the war began, everyone reverted immediately to a nineteenth-century mentality," Joschka Fischer, a leading German parliamentarian, told me.)

Only America is capable of sorting out the deadlock and hence preventing the entire post-nationalist atmosphere on the continent from backsliding dangerously. This is so not only because the U.S. is the sole superpower. It is also because we are, uniquely, a Western country that enjoys a measure of impartiality among the states of the West—periodic French suspicions notwithstanding. The old formulation of NATO's true goals—"to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down"—still holds, albeit in modified, post-cold war form.

Great-power competition on the European continent would pose much higher costs for the U.S. than we are now shouldering in Bosnia. Of course, as Mandelbaum argues, "post-Cold War Europe lacks great European military powers to prosecute such a rivalry," and the likelihood of dangerous competition among these states is, therefore, near zero now. But that would not necessarily obtain forever in the case of U.S. disengagement, as Mandelbaum himself acknowledges a few pages later in his article when he says the U.S. must retain a military presence in Europe and Asia to preserve regional balances of power. Otherwise, he notes, Germany and Japan might be tempted to rearm, even with nuclear weapons, setting off a "dangerous chain reaction."

This is not a high, immediate risk. But Bosnia isn't D-Day, either. It is a limited commitment of 20,000 troops—though it may well take more than the year Clinton has promised to yield lasting results. In this sense, the American mission necessarily does contain elements of both "social work" and empire. We have to leave behind some sort of self-sustaining political order. In particular, lasting peace cannot be built on denial about responsibility for the war and atrocities. NATO must provide security for a thorough investigation of mass grave sites the Serbs are currently scrambling to conceal; it is absurd that American troops could sit in their M-1A1 tanks mere miles from Srebrenica, fretting about "mission creep."

But, considering the benefits of a stable and cohesive Europe, the potential costs to the U.S. of even a fairly aggressive role in Bosnia seem justified. Like it or not, a U.S. presence in Bosnia has become a test of America's historic engagement in Europe as a whole. The only thing worse than flunking that test would have been not showing up for it. •

CAMPAIGN JOURNAL

THE GRIZ

By Michael Lewis

January 11

Within minutes of landing in Des Moines you know that you have arrived in the American Midwest. The Midwest is the straight man of the Western world, millions and millions of square miles peopled with Abbotts without their Costellos. It's not that Midwesterners lack a sense of humor; it's just that they regard humor as second-rate behavior, the opposite of, rather than a complement to, seriousness. It's no wonder that professional Midwestern humorists—Garrison Keillor, David Letterman—have the feel of men who have spun out of some orbit.

I've come to Iowa to find Morry Taylor, the man who by a landslide won the hearts of the United We Stand delegates at Ross Perot's convention last fall. (After hearing him speak, 400 of the 2,000 people present signed up to work on his campaign.) Taylor has spent his entire life in the Midwest and counts as the only bona fide commercial success story out of the nine candidates in the Republican field. He started out as a tool and die maker, attended Michigan Tech and in the early 1980s, in his mid-40s, after a career selling wheels for farm equipment, began to buy distressed tire and wheel plants and turn them around. Today he is the chief executive of Titan Tire and Wheel International, which finished last year with $620 million in revenues, no debt and one of the highest profit margins of any company listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

The strange thing about Taylor is that he hasn't gotten more play in the press or the polls. He's the real thing: an extremely successful businessman who has behaved about as well as an extremely successful businessman can. He employs 5,500 people—1,200 of them in Des Moines—at a wage rate of $12 to $17 an hour, all of whom are included in a profit-sharing plan. He pays himself a modest salary and argues forcefully and often that CEOs of publicly held corporations should never be paid more than about twenty times the wages of their most menial workers. Actually, that's probably one of the reasons no one has heard of him until now.

January 12

We start our day just before 8:00 inside a motor home plastered all over with Morry's favorite screaming eagle logo—the one his campaign staffers plead with him to abandon. A ferocious-looking bird flies out of the T in Morry's last name, which is painted in huge letters

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across the side of the colossal machine. Morry's campaign manager tried to talk him out of the expense, but Morry insisted that the best way to start running for president was to buy six RVs—land yachts, they are called—and race them in a convoy across each of Iowa's ninety-nine counties and through every New Hampshire hamlet: six monstrosities all jammed together and churning down the highway at eighty miles per hour, with the Pointer Sisters blaring out of the lead vehicle, drowning out everything but Morry. Morry figured that he'd roll them into a town, surround the courthouse, flip on the loud speakers, tap a few kegs of beer, and everyone for miles would be talking about Morry Taylor for the next two weeks. (He was right.)

Today like every other day Morry is wearing his American flag tie. He's shouting over music and the roar of the land yacht into a telephone at a radio talk-show host. "Anyone who wants to come and help call 1-800-USA-BEAR." The talk-show host asks him some question. "Well," replies Morry, "I use the bear number because my nickname is the Griz."

"Why do they call you the Griz?" I ask, after he hangs up. It seems the natural next question.

"I got that when I took the company public," he shouts. "At the closing they gave me this plaque. It says—and they did it in Latin, which language I can't speak—but this is what it says: IN NORTH AMERICA THERE IS NO KNOWN PREDATOR TO THE GRIZZLY. So I became the Griz. Then I thought about it. Up until that time I kind of liked my other nickname, Attila. 'Cause of Attila the Hun, you know. People think Attila the Hun was a barbarian but he's not. He's the guy who ran the Roman Legion out of town."

Morry then shouts back at Lenny, an extremely resourceful young man whose job is to race around sorting out the chaos that Morry creates wherever he goes in Iowa and New Hampshire.

"Hey piss-boy. Are we in the Connecticut primary?"

There's some shuffling in the back of the land yacht. "I'm not sure," says Lenny.

"I'm on about the same as Dole," says Morry. "Dole and I are on the most ballots." Which is true. Although Morry's strategy is to focus on Iowa and New Hampshire ("If I win Iowa, New Hampshire's mine, too"), the United We Stand people have created a truly national organization for him. And while the other marginal candidates in the field—Alan Keyes and Bob Dornan—are running to win their 2 or 3 percent of the vote, which they can then cash in like chips in a casino for prestige and appointments, Morry has no interest in anything short of total victory. He is also the only candidate who is the least bit persuasive when he says he has no interest in being president for more than four years. "Why the hell would I want to do that?" he says. "I like my life." And he does.

At 9:00 the land yacht rolls up beside the front door of the Ames High School and disgorges Morry. Morry then does his usual trick of startling the locals. He bursts through both double doors leading into the school, which, like all the doors he will open for the rest of the day, slam violently against the wall behind them. He marches off down a long corridor with the rest of us trying to keep up, leaving a trail of startled adolescents in his wake. He swaggers like a quarterback on the way to a huddle.

"Did you play sports in high school?" I ask Morry, or rather, the back of Morry's head. He doesn't even look around. He's shaking his head; I have no trouble imagining the scorn on his face. My question is plainly ridiculous. "*Did I play sports?*" he asks. "I am the biggest jock who ever ran for president. I can beat you in anything." And with that he blows through the double doors leading into the auditorium.

High school probably was not prepared for Morry Taylor the first time he passed through, and it most certainly is no match for him now that he's sitting on $40 million-plus of Titan stock and a fully fueled presidential campaign. About thirty kids file in, slump down into their seats and settle in for a snooze they'll never have.

"Your school is too big," booms Morry, and as the kids jolt and stir he enters his stream of consciousness. "This is what is wrong with America," he says, pointing at the kids. "Big, big, big. You don't see no little kids in here. No little kids with the big kids so that the little kids don't have anyone to look up to. When I was in school the third-graders looked up to the eighth-graders, and the eighth-grade boys were in love with the senior girls. The senior girls just thought they were cute little twerps, but it was good for them. Some kid comes to school with orange hair, you don't have to call the parents. Hell, we'll take care of the orange hair. A place like this breeds weirdos."

The students are now fully alert.

"I never could enjoy going to a school like this," concludes Morry. The kids seem to concur.

"How many of you ever take accounting?" he asks. The kids are now squirming and ducking: he's breaking down their resistance, making them nervous. Two hands go up. Morry shakes his head, a little sadly. His tone

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changes. "I know you got a lot of these teachers"—he waves nonchalantly at a couple of uneasy-looking older men in the rafters—"and they tell you a lot of ..." (he doesn't use the word "crap" but he might as well) "*things* ... but in your whole entire life you are only going to *use* one or maybe two of those things. Hell, I took 257 engineering courses, and I never *used* one of them."

He pauses and seems to reconsider. I wonder if he's about to make a little plea for the joy of learning for its own sake, the importance of a liberal education, that sort of thing. He isn't. "Now we all agree that the most important thing in your life is your family," he says. "Your momma and your daddy, your brothers and your sisters. But right after that there's something else. We all know what it is, and it's ... GREEN."

With that he reaches into his pocket and produces a fat roll of $100 bills. He holds it high so that everyone can see. Five grand. Cash. The kids are now perched on the edge of their seats, giggling nervously, probably wondering what they feed presidential candidates.

"It all comes down to accounting," says Morry. "Accounting and money. You can't live without it. And the minute you make it someone is trying to take it away from you. So FOR GOD'S SAKE, find out about money!"

"Can I have some?" asks a kid in the front row.

"It's MINE!" shouts Morry, and puts the money back in his pocket, a nice illustration of some general business principle. The teachers are now frowning, but the kids are unable to preserve their original detachment.

It's time to talk politics.

Morry's positions are somewhat quixotic: he's pro-choice (rousingly so, if asked), for the death penalty (ditto), against sending troops to Bosnia. No economics professor is a match for his dissection of Steve Forbes's plan to cut the capital gains tax rate to zero. "I sold $15 million worth of stock to get into this thing," he says. "I paid $5 million to Uncle Sam. Under Steve Forbes's plan I wouldda paid nuthin. The guys who work for me would pay 17 percent on what they earn, and I would have paid no tax at all. And that's wrong." But even this is subordinate to his outrage at the inefficiency of our government. He's running on a platform of balancing the budget in eighteen months not by eliminating programs but by firing a third of the best-paid government employees. Having balanced the budget he will then cut both programs and taxes.

"How many of you want to give the government 40 percent of what you earn after you get outta here?" he asks the crowd. One of the kids—a "weirdo" with a wispy beard—raises his hand. "Mark his name down," says Morry. "An institution needs him. We're going to study his brain. He's not human. He's an alien."

And so it goes until Morry ends with a rousing call to arms: "This is it folks! This is the only time you have a choice: by November the only choice for president is between light grey and medium grey."

January 13

Tonight we flew in one of Morry's private planes to a Republican county dinner at Storm Lake, in northwestern Iowa. It was held in a large warehouse disguised as a convention hall. Morry, who is sitting at the head table, pops up and beats the crowd to the buffet table, where he snags a fried chicken breast, green beans, mashed potatoes and an anemic-looking salad. Surveying the crowd upon his return he says, "This is going to be wild tonight. That guy at the end of the table—crazier than hell. He writes for the conservative paper. There's going to be some smiles and some people pissed-off." I point out that, out of 150 people, two have availed themselves of the cash bar. All the rest are drinking iced tea. "If you were a Democrat you'd have a lot more fun," I say.

"You know something about these people?" he says. "Your wife gets sick, and every one of these people would visit her. They'd take turns bringing meals by your house. Maybe not that many of them dance,"—a Cheshire Cat smile—"but they would *love* watchin' me dance."

A bit later Morry rises to speak. He's on: within minutes he has the crowd laughing and clapping. They agree with him about everything, especially the lunacy of the Forbes tax plan. Then in the midst of the fun a woman rises and challenges his pro-choice position. "It's a religious issue," Morry says, "not a matter for the federal government." She presses him: you can see she's used to making public speakers either come around to her way of thinking or regret ever opening their mouths. She's picked the wrong guy today. Instead of backing down or wiggling, Morry goes on the attack: "Look ma'am, I think 99 percent of women never want an abortion. They go through a lot of mental anguish. They suffer a lot. I say leave it to them." She tries to speak. Morry interrupts: "I said, LEAVE ... IT ... TO ... THE ... WOMEN."

And there, at a banquet filled with Republican Party hacks, the sort of people who are meant to be rabidly pro-life, who Morry *expected* to be rabidly pro-life, a volcano of spontaneous applause erupted. All over the room women were clapping so hard I thought they'd break their hands. Here, I thought, is the benefit of having someone around who feels free to speak his mind. He liberates, however momentarily, those who don't.

January 14

I was waiting at the front desk of the Des Moines YMCA when Morry arrived just before 9 a.m.: "What, you thought I wouldn't show?" The racquetball game took just under twenty-two minutes. Morry won: 15-0, 15-5. I had figured that between the twenty-five extra pounds he's carrying around and the sixteen years he has on me I could outhustle him. I was wrong. He knew every angle and trick on the court and played each one with relish. "Too good!" he'd shout after he'd dropped the ball into the corner for the tenth time. As the rout progressed he shouted to his aides—who had at length turned up—to come and watch. "Fourteen to zip, not bad for an old guy," he shouted. And then, under his breath, "Some of my guys are betting on you. Dip shits." As we crawl through the hole out the back of the court

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he says, "Don't you go write that you lost because you were nervous the presidential candidate was going to have a heart attack." Camus identified the love of winning at games as one of the prerequisites of happiness in the modern world. And he did that without ever meeting Morry.

I went over to Titan Tire about an hour before the big debate—*The Des Moines Register* forum, it is called—and found Morry still in his sweat clothes with his feet up on his desk scratching out his two-minute closing statement. On the other side of his desk his campaign manager looks on with a mixture of affection and anxiety. "Hey," Morry says when he sees me, "tell me what you think of this," and over his manager's protests he reads his remarks aloud. Half of it isn't bad, but the other half is a series of wisecracks about Bob Dole that don't seem to belong in a presidential debate.

I offer my first strategic political advice: cut the Dole stuff, stress the unfairness of Forbes's tax plan compared to his own by using his own experience and find a place to let people know that he's pro-choice. His manager winces. The Taylor campaign feels the surest way to turn off Republican primary voters is to be loudly pro-choice, and its true that it didn't exactly work for Arlen Specter. I make two points: (a) half the people at the Storm Lake event—party hacks every one—had to restrain themselves from leaping to their feet and cheering when Morry came out with his beliefs; and (b) it's not as if Morry has any votes to lose.

Outside the Des Moines television station there were two chanting mobs of about 200 people divided by a street. One held bright orange signs that said EXPOSE THE RIGHT; the other jabbed signs for Dole, Gramm and Morry. I slid past and into the studio, where I presented myself as attached to the Taylor campaign. They signed me in but did not quite believe me—the woman insisted on walking me down to Morry's studio. As we entered the back corridor we bumped into Morry on his way to the stage. He's strutting. Both arms are swinging, and a cluster of six people are failing to keep up with him.

Morry was seated exactly where he wanted to be, between Dole and Gramm. After the last debate, in South Carolina, he complained of being seated next to Keyes ("the guy nearly blew out my eardrums"). His situation facilitates one of his best lines, "I got a couple of million bucks of government pensions sitting on either side of me." The studio loves it, but it was probably lost on the TV audience, since the camera keeps to tight shots of the candidates. No one has any idea who Morry is sitting next to.

Very little separates the other candidates—it's merely a matter of emphasis. Light grey and medium grey, as Morry put it. Keyes and Buchanan stress their pro-life message. All the other candidates except Morry agree or at least refuse to disagree. The exchanges feel tentative, provisional. It's like one of those pick-up basketball games in which everyone who loses pretends he wasn't trying. About midway through it becomes clear that only the spinners will be truly pleased. Because no one clearly won or lost, their job of clearing up the ambiguity for reporters becomes more important. Still, one thing is clear: how organic and fluid the process is. Every one of the candidates stands a chance of shaping future policy. Anyone who lands upon an issue and proves its electoral merit is likely to have his issue poached by the winner. If Morry succeeds in making Forbes's tax plan look ridiculous, for instance, he will have struck one of the great blows for fairness, even though no one will remember his name. And he might: the other candidates are starting to pick up on his rap.

As we near the ninety-minute mark Morry is invited to offer his closing remarks. He has cut the jokes about Dole, stressed his views about the Forbes tax plan with a personal anecdote. As I realize what is happening a little shiver of concern runs down my spine. No, I think, he couldn't be so foolish as to take my advice. But then he says, "Since it has come up so often I think I should say a few words about a woman's choice."

"Time's up, Mr. Taylor," says the moderator.

"Okay," says Morry. He actually was going to do it, he tells me after the debate. But he's too busy telling reporters about his racquetball triumph to spin his performance.

I rush to the airport with one more bag than I came with to carry all the stuff Morry gave me: t-shirts, baseball caps, candy, literature. The American Airlines ticket counter is empty. As I stand there, up rushes a man who looks a little like Bob Dornan and asks if there are any seats left on the Chicago flight. He *is* Bob Dornan. B-1 Bob. The ladies behind the counter fail to recognize him. Dornan drops a hint: "I was just participating in the presidential debate," he says. This means nothing to the women behind the counter, who have found a seat but are now demanding a ticket and identification, which Dornan can't find. "I'm a congressman," he says, as if this explains anything. The women fail to be impressed by this fact. "I think I won the presidential debate," he says. They ignore him completely.

It is a nice illustration of a general principle: if a celebrity falls in the woods and the witnesses do not know who he is, no one hears him. Finally I say, "You did really well," which is only a slight exaggeration, and then explain to the ladies behind the counter who Bob Dornan is. His credibility skyrockets. They treat him as a big shot. You never can tell who might be president one day.

Dornan and I walk together to the end of the concourse. There we are nearly alone with a clear view of a row of private jets across the tarmac. He points to a Lear Jet. I tell him it belongs to Dole. Dornan is clearly upset. "You'd think the guy could give me a ride back," he says. "When I quit doing this he'll expect me to endorse him and act as a surrogate, and he can't even give me a ride back." The prospect lingers in the air between us. Then perhaps by way of explanation he says: "If I get 2 percent in New Hampshire I'll have done well." •

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ME AND MRS. SMITH

By Michael Lind

Her allies call her "Newt Gingrich's Newt Gingrich." Her opponents use other terms. "I've been called an idiot, an imbecile and a lot of other names," says Republican freshman Linda Smith. The reason: Smith is the most determined leader of a drive to rewrite the rules of campaign finance to reduce the role of money in national politics.

As a strategy for some kind of Republican revival, she is surely on to something. One of the primary reasons the GOP revolution has run aground is that the Republicans have betrayed the populism responsible for their success in November 1994. In the Republicans' balanced budget proposal, they ignored corporate welfare, cut taxes for the rich and slashed programs aimed at helping the poor. They have done little to address middle-class economic insecurity and have allowed corporate lobbyists to write key parts of legislation. They have only tinkered at political reform. Perhaps the one way they can now resuscitate themselves is to embrace radical campaign finance legislation. Which is where Smith comes in.

In the House, in the last week of October, Smith and fellow Republican Christopher Shays of Connecticut joined with a Massachusetts Democrat, Martin Meehan, to introduce a "Bipartisan Clean Congress Act," a companion to a Senate bill introduced in September by Republican Senators John McCain of Arizona and Fred Thompson of Tennessee, and Russ Feingold, a Democrat from Wisconsin. Although the bills differ somewhat in detail, their essential features are the same:

Political Action Committees. The reformers would ban them from making contributions. PACs have multiplied to more than 4,000 since 1974, when there were only 600. Although the AFL-CIO spawned the first powerhouse political action committee, in recent years PACs have skewed the political system toward the business class and the right. In 1990, for example, 65 percent of PAC contributions came from corporate PACs, with labor PACs contributing only 24 percent and ideological PACs (conservative as well as liberal) 11 percent.

Out-of-State Money. The House and Senate reform bills would require that the majority of individual donations come from within a candidate's state. This would dramatically reverse the recent trend toward congressmen and senators becoming ever more dependent on money coming from out-of-state sources; by 1990, for example, half of all U.S. senators received most of their large individual donations from states other than their own.

An effective limit on out-of-state contributions (joined, perhaps, with Pat Buchanan's even more radical idea of limits on out-of-district contributions) would dramatically reduce the disproportionate influence of wealthy donors in a few cities—indeed, in a few neighborhoods—on races across the country. Conservatives claim the Democrats are financed by Hollywood; liberals retort that the Republicans are owned by Wall Street. They're both right. In 1992, a *Roll Call* report disclosed, one zip code in Manhattan's Upper East Side, 10021, generated more political donations than each of twenty-one separate states. The 31,000 residents of Beverly Hills made twice as many campaign contributions as the 1.1 million inhabitants of San Diego.

Soft Money. Another long-overdue reform promoted by the bipartisan reformers is the elimination of "soft money" contributions—unlimited contributions to the parties for "party-building activities" that both the Democrats and Republicans have used to circumvent legal limits on direct contributions to individual campaigns. In his testimony to the House Oversight Committee, Newt Gingrich suggested that the parties should play a greater role in financing campaigns, a reform that would in effect expand and institutionalize the soft-money loophole and magnify the power of out-of-state interests and wealthy individuals at the expense of ordinary voters.

Bundling. The bipartisan reform bills would also outlaw the "bundling" of small contributions solicited by special interests. Under the present system, corporations, law firms, unions and ideological groups often evade the $10,000 limit ($5,000 each for a primary and general election) on PAC contributions by bundling allegedly discrete individual donations into a single massive donation from a single source.

Media costs. The congressional reformers would provide reduced postal and television advertising rates as an incentive for candidates to observe voluntary spending limits.

Campaign finance reform has long been a pet cause

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of good-government liberals. Again and again, it has fallen prey to partisan politics. The last Democratic Congress passed a gift ban and new, stricter requirements for the registration of lobbyists, only to see both killed in the Senate by a Republican filibuster even though Republicans had offered their own reform bill. In the past, each party has tried to push through legislation that damages its own fund-raising the least. Democrats, dependent on labor and ideological groups like Emily's List, have tended to be kind to PACs. Republicans, benefiting from donations from corporations and rich individuals, propose reforming disclosure laws as an alternative to stricter spending limits. What's new about the current movement for reform is that it's both bipartisan and bicameral. The Senate and House bills are supported not only by the usual suspects like Common Cause, but by Ross Perot's United We Stand and a variety of Republicans from different backgrounds and factions.

Linda Smith and Christopher Shays, for example, come from different wings of the Republican Party. Smith is a populist conservative, whose office features a blown-up photo of her with her husband and grandchildren, one of whom has the giant label "82 percent" attached (the percentage of his income in adulthood that he will pay in taxes, on pre-1995 budget trend lines). Before coming to Congress, Smith spent more than a decade in the Washington State Legislature.

When she arrived in Olympia in 1983, Smith says, she was shocked by the money culture of the state legislature, which revolved around "campaign funds" and "office funds." So-called office funds could be used to pay for lunches, clothes, vacations—and to launder illegal campaign contributions. "I was mad," Smith tells me in her Capitol office adorned with a scene of the Pacific Northwest woods. "I was shocked. When you get that blatant, it's like swimming in a sewer and trying to keep your nose above water." Smith refused to get used to the stink. After a successful campaign for re-election that turned into "a bidding war" for PAC money, she resolved, "When we get through, I'm going to change it."

With the help of Common Cause and other citizens' groups, the Republican purist Smith tried to push reform legislation through the Washington State Senate several times—and failed. The Washington State Constitution provides for initiatives, however. When Smith and her allies took the reform plan to the voters in 1992, they succeeded. Not that Smith had become a liberal; she also authored an initiative, ratified in the next election, that imposed limits on state taxes and expenditures.

Sent to Washington as a member of the populist Republican class of '94, Smith encountered horrors unmatched in Olympia. "It's easier to raise money in Washington than in your district," Smith says she was told by more experienced members of Congress, whom she mimics: "I don't have to fly back all the time.... I've paid off my mortgage here.... I don't even have a house in my district anymore." Speaking three times on different panels at Ross Perot's United We Stand convention in Dallas last August, Smith drew a rapturous response. At the time, Smith had her own bill, which differed from the present House bill in requiring 100 percent of contributions to be in-state (the present bill provides for a sixty-forty bias in favor of state residents) and in not imposing spending limits.

In late summer, after "three days" spent in careful study of the alternative legislation, Smith decided to join forces with Shays and Meehan in the House and McCain, Thompson and Feingold in the Senate. "The enemy of the good is the perfect," Smith repeats several times in our conversation, as though persuading herself. The House bill has "eighty percent of what I'd like." Though Smith was willing to merely reduce the amounts PACs could give in Washington state politics, she wants to do away with PAC contributions to national races altogether: "You have to sterilize this place," she says intensely.

In contrast, Smith's Republican co-sponsor, Christopher Shays, a representative from Connecticut since 1987, does not have giant pictures of his grandchildren in his office. Instead, there is an elegant print of the Connecticut state capital in Hartford. If Smith has the manner of a no-nonsense principal, this moderate East Coast Republican has the genial demeanor of a guidance counselor.

Shays attributes his long-term support for campaign finance reform to his 1974 election to the Connecticut House of Representatives as a "Watergate baby." As Shays sees it, reform has three "legs": the ban on gifts to senators and members of Congress, lobbyist disclosure and campaign finance reform. In all three cases, perhaps surprisingly, however, the initiative for reform has come from the Senate. Not that U.S. senators are inherently more virtuous than congressmen: they're just more likely to be independently wealthy and, because of their statewide constituencies, often less dependent on a small number of interest groups. But both Shays and Smith assured me that their troops in the House are just as enthusiastic and that the voters are not going to be bought off by the gift ban and lobbying disclosure reform alone, without a major reduction in the special-interest money flowing to candidates.

Shays and Smith admit it was no easy task to put their reform coalition together. The press conference fell apart three times before they finally went through with it in October. Shays acknowledges that Linda Smith's zeal was "the catalyst" that moved the coalition to a public declaration earlier than planned. As Smith tells it, what motivated the reformers to put aside their remaining differences was the spectacle of both Newt Gingrich and Richard Gephardt testifying before the House Oversight Committee in November in favor of delaying reform by turning it over to a commission.

Ironically, before he became speaker, Gingrich had joined Bob Michel in sponsoring a campaign finance reform bill that would have outlawed PACs. Gingrich's

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tune changed, though, when the Republicans won control of Congress and learned that money flows to the party in power. In the first six months of 1995 alone, the Republicans broke the record by raising $20,105,822 in soft money—twice the amount raised by Democrats in the same period. Freshman representatives sent to Washington to change the way business is done proved fast learners, raising 45 percent of their campaign funds ($5 million) from PACs. "Good people get used to a bad system," Smith observes. Very quickly.

After the Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress in November 1994, Republican leaders did their best to squelch any discussion of the topic, even as they began intimidating lobbyists into switching their financial support to the GOP. "Campaign finance reform will not be on the agenda," Senator Mitch McConnell, the Republican point man on the subject, snapped after the election. "There's no ground swell for it. We won't waste any time on it." Senator Phil Gramm joked, "I am eager to reform our campaign process, just as the Democrats were when they were in the majority." The House refused to join the Senate in requiring new disclosure rules for lobbyists, and House Majority Leader Dick Armey announced that the simplest reform of all—banning gifts by lobbyists to members of Congress—would be delayed (under pressure from the House reformers, both measures have now been passed).

Cooling on campaign finance reform, Gingrich waited for five months before responding to President Clinton's challenge, at a joint meeting in New Hampshire, to act on the issue. When he finally did, he suggested putting off a vote for at least a year and turning the matter over to a bipartisan commission that would report back on May 1, 1996. The commission would no doubt need all of that time. Testifying before the House Oversight Committee, Gingrich suggested: "I would encourage you to at least have your staff talk with experts around the country about what happened in Greece, in Rome, and the period from the English Civil War up through our Constitution, and to look at the works of Jefferson and Madison, Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry Cabot Lodge and Wilson, because this is not a new problem. This problem of how do you organize power so people can be free has happened over a very long period of time."

This response merely galvanized the Republican populists. Smith scoffs at Gingrich's complaints that campaign finance limits haven't been indexed for inflation. She notes that campaign spending is up 67 percent since 1980 in real dollars. "What we need is not more study of the problem of money and politics in Washington," she responded on the op-ed page of *The New York Times* on November 8. "What we need is to end the problem."

They still have a way to go. If the House bill has not emerged from committee by the end of February, Smith and Shays plan to use a parliamentary maneuver, a discharge petition, to get it to the House floor for a vote, where members of Congress will, Smith hopes, be too scared to vote against it. In this effort, the reformers are hoping to mobilize a coalition consisting of longtime reform supporters such as Common Cause and the League of Women Voters. Additional muscle comes from Ross Perot, who has enthusiastically endorsed the House and Senate reform bills. The platform of Perot's new Independence Party (called the Reform Party in California) is short on substantive issues like NAFTA but strong on reforms of the political process, including campaign finance reform. "I think the Perot voters are at the center of it," Shays explains. "They're the ones who are the most disaffected."

But Shays and Smith garnered support from another unexpected source last fall. On October 5, Republican presidential candidate Patrick J. Buchanan turned up the heat on the Republican leadership in Congress another notch or two when he announced his own reform plan. Like the House and Senate bills, Buchanan's package would ban contributions by PACs and require House and Senate members to raise money only from their own districts or states.

The Republican insurgents find support for their cause in the observations on fund-raising's distortion of politics made by former members of Congress in a new book by Martin Schram, *Speaking Freely: Former Members of Congress Talk About Money in Politics*, published by the Washington-based Center for Responsive Politics. Former Congressman Guy Vander Jagt from Michigan suggests that Congress "require that 51 percent of the money raised would have to come from within the congressman's district. With that provision, you'll ipso facto put a ceiling on what PACs can give. You immediately switch the congressman's attention from PACs here in Washington back to the congressional district and the people he's representing.... "

Former Republican Congressman Vin Weber from Minnesota, a leading conservative during his years in Congress, argues that public financing of campaigns "remedies a couple of problems. I think it certainly minimizes the amount of time people have to spend raising money." He adds, "I'd have no problem in abolishing PACs." Another retired Republican congressman, Hamilton Fish from New York, favors "free access to television and radio." Former House Minority Leader Robert Michel believes that as much as 75 percent of campaign contributions should come from the district. And he wants to abolish the leadership PACs, which permit congressional barons to contribute money to fellow members.

If Gingrich hasn't quite grasped what's unraveling his popularity, Smith and Shays have. The Republican reformers have staked their prestige and their relationships with the House leadership and many of their fellow Republicans on the success of their cause. Shays observes, "You don't make friends voting to change the way things are done in Congress." Smith doesn't harbor any illusions about her colleagues, either: "If it doesn't work, they'll eat us alive." •

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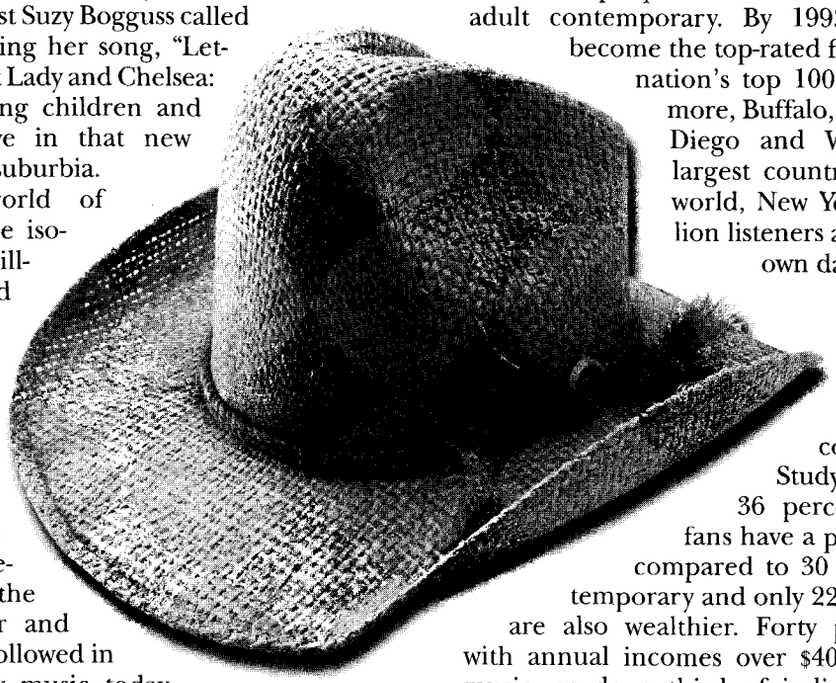
GONE COUNTRY

By Bruce Feiler

Never one to pass up a political opening, Bill Clinton stepped to the stage on the South Lawn of the White House last May to introduce a PBS special on the "Women of Country" and offered the following somewhat self-serving explanation for Nashville's recent surge in popularity: "Country music vividly demonstrates America's fundamental ability to adapt and change." He then went on to credit country's blending of cultures from the mountains of Appalachia, the fields of the South and the deserts of the "cowboy West."

But the president was out of date—country isn't about those things anymore. These days it's much more often about what first guest Suzy Bogguss called to mind in dedicating her song, "Letting Go," to the First Lady and Chelsea: getting older, raising children and learning to survive in that new American frontier, suburbia.



The storied world of Nashville—once the isolated bastion of hillbilly crooners and hard-drinking ballads—has suddenly become the unlikely center of American cultural life, the patron city of the radical middle. Just as rock-and-roll foreshadowed many of the changes in gender and race relations that followed in the 1960s, country music today—with its suburban, middle-aged themes of family and renewal—may be the clearest reflection of many of the anxieties and aspirations that have just begun to bubble to the surface in American political life.

To begin with, there are the legions of new fans—Southern *and* Northern now, button-down as well as hayseed—who have flocked to the music in recent years. Seventy million Americans now listen to country radio every week, a total of 42 percent of all radio listeners. These listeners include a third of all Americans who have ever enrolled in a master's program, 40 percent of single adults between 25 and 39 and—if you need proof of country's appeal outside of Texas—half of all Americans who own a snowmobile.

With 2,642 radio stations now programming Nashville's latest, country music has become the dominant radio format in the United States, reaching 20 million more people a week than its closest competitor, adult contemporary. By 1993, country radio had become the top-rated format in fifty-five of the nation's top 100 cities, including Baltimore, Buffalo, Milwaukee, Seattle, San Diego and Washington, D.C. The largest country radio station in the world, New York's WYNY, has 1 million listeners a day, not to mention its own dating service.

And country fans are more educated than either adult contemporary or rock audiences. According to the Simmons Study of Media and Markets, 36 percent of country music fans have a post-graduate degree, as compared to 30 percent for adult contemporary and only 22 percent for rock. They are also wealthier. Forty percent of individuals with annual incomes over $40,000 listen to country music, as do a third of individuals who earn over $100,000 a year.

This money has changed the character of the record business. Country album sales, which now total almost 18 percent of the market, have surpassed $2 billion a year, twice their total in 1990 and twenty times what they were in 1970. In 1985, just before the current boom, ten new country albums went Gold (sales of 500,000 units), while seven went Platinum, meaning they topped 1 million. In 1993, fifteen albums went

BRUCE FEILER, author of *Learning to Bow* (Ticknor & Fields) and *Under the Big Top* (Scribner), is writing a book about country music.

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Gold, twenty-six went Platinum, five reached 2 million in sales, four reached 3 million, one passed 7 million and one, Garth Brooks's *No Fences*, topped 10,000,000 units.

How revolutionary are these numbers?

In December, Garth Brooks, the prototypical clean-cut, yes-ma'am, aw-shucks suburban cowboy, became the third-highest-selling artist of *all time*—behind only the Beatles and Billy Joel and *ahead* of Madonna, Michael Jackson, even Elvis. With a new album, *Fresh Horses,* hitting stores last Thanksgiving, Brooks, who has now sold 56 million albums (compared with the Beatles' 70 million), will almost surely catapult to number two on the list when new figures are issued this month. It's time to stand up and face the music: some time before the end of the century, while you're still listening to the Grateful Dead and Elvis Costello, Garth Brooks will become the best-selling recording artist in American history.

Then there are the people who make all this music. Once almost exclusively from the Appalachian hills of West Virginia and the Baptist bayous of Mississippi, the performers who populate country music in the '90s are swarming to Nashville from all over the world—especially New York and L.A. (Nashville's newest nickname, the "Third Coast," reflects this change.) Mary-Chapin Carpenter, a singer on the cutting edge of Nashville's new liberal wing, was born in Princeton, New Jersey, raised in part in Tokyo and educated at Brown University. Shania Twain, whose album *The Woman in Me* was number one for much of last summer, is a native of Windsor, Ontario. Even my college neighbor from Yale, a Jewish Wall Street broker's son from Scarsdale, New York, is now making the rounds of singer/songwriter nights in every linoleum pizza joint within warbling distance of Music Row in Nashville.

These musicians—smarter, hipper; their fans—older, wiser; and ultimately the music itself—crisper, cleaner and much more clearly about core American values than anything coming out of Seattle or New York in the last ten years—combine to create one of the most vivid examples of America's reigning backlash against its own culturally liberal past. Hints of this trend have popped up elsewhere in American life—in the anti-violence campaign against Hollywood, in the movement against violent rock and rap music lyrics and in the agitated white suburban voice embodied by Newt Gingrich. But the common thread that ties these voices together is still mostly ignored by the political establishment, though it's offered around the clock—and for free—on your radio dial.

For Nashville, the road to the mainstream has been roundabout, at best. The music that eventually fell under the rubric of "country" first evolved about a century ago out of an eclectic array of sources including Irish and Scottish string music, Mississippi blues and Christian hymns. By the 1920s, big-city businessmen had caught on to the financial potential of this "old-time" or "hillbilly" music, which soon found a home on burgeoning commercial radio. A generation later, when radio turned to rock and country floundered, Nashville responded with more aggressive promotion and a new sound. The "Nashville Sound," blending orchestrated pop with country-fied themes, provided a foundation for a new roster of crossover artists like Jim Reeves, Eddy Arnold and Patsy Cline. Building on this initial success, Nashville began attracting more sophisticated audiences in the 1970s, folding in new stars like Kris Kristofferson, a Rhodes Scholar, and Willie Nelson, the thinking-man's outlaw. This pop-country trend reached its apotheosis with the release of the film *Urban Cowboy* in 1980, which suddenly convinced millions of Americans they were interested in country music.

Then came the bust. Predictably, the national fascination with all things Texan proved to be a fad. Audiences dropped, and in 1986 country album sales shrank to around 9 percent of the market, their lowest level in almost twenty years. This could have marked the end of country music as a national institution. The fact that it didn't—the fact that country music rebounded in the late 1980s and '90s to a point far higher than anyone in Nashville (or New York or L.A., for that matter) ever dreamed possible—ultimately says as much about America as it does about the music.

The conventional explanation for the growth in country music tends to focus on changes within the music industry itself—the decline of traditional pop radio, for instance. According to this theory, as contemporary music became more ethnic—with rap, house and urban dance music suddenly dominating the airwaves—many listeners became disenchanted and began searching for new buttons on their radios.

Another explanation focuses on changes in the way album sales were recorded. In 1991 SoundScan introduced a new, computerized monitoring system, which for the first time calculated albums actually sold, rather than sales projections. By coincidence (or fate, as Nashville would have it), the week the new system went into effect in late September, 1991, Garth Brooks debuted at the top of both the country *and* the pop charts with his third album, *Ropin' the Wind,* the first album ever to achieve this feat.

Finally, the other leading contention is that changes in the music itself account for country's unprecedented popularity. According to this view, singers like Ricky Skaggs, George Strait and Randy Travis reacted to the post-*Urban Cowboy* bust by turning the music away from its crossover amalgam sound and back to its traditional roots. While there is some truth to this—Randy Travis sold 3 million copies of *Storms of Life* without a crossover hit—the music of these so-called New Traditionalists still showed strikingly mainstream sensibilities. While New Traditionalism may have contributed to the surge of interest in country music, it did little to change the music itself. In the end, the music basically stayed where it was, while the country moved to it.

By 1990, the first of the baby-boomers were just

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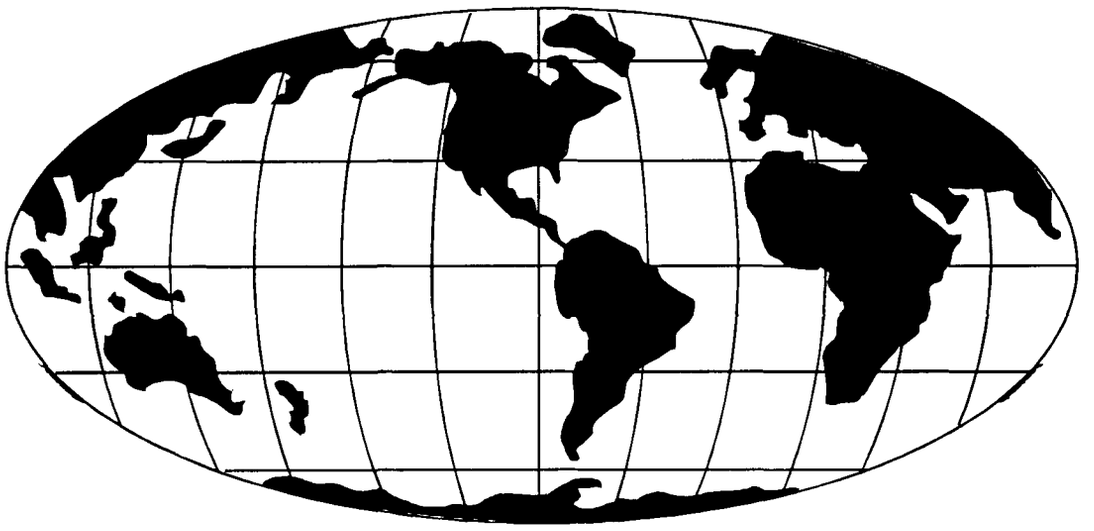

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reaching 40, and it was these people who first reached out to Nashville. "Country music is about lyric-oriented songs with adult themes," says Lon Helton, country editor of *Radio & Records*, the industry's leading publication. "You've probably got to be 24 or 25 to even understand a country song. Life has to slap you around a little bit, and then you go, 'Now I get what they're singing about.' " Two-thirds of country music listeners are between the ages of 25 and 54—40 percent of all Americans born between 1940 and 1970. More middle-aged Americans listen to country music every week than the total number of Americans who voted for Bill Clinton in 1992.

But an even bigger demographic shift that has fed country music is the movement of these baby-boomers away from downtown. In the first half of the century Americans moved in massive numbers from the country to the city. Jazz, blues, even rock-and-roll all reflected, in one way or another, this migration, while country music remained predominantly a rural music. The second half of this century has seen a different shift as Americans have decamped from the cities to the suburbs. Only 12 percent of Americans now live in cities of 500,000 or more. By contrast, 50 percent of Americans now live in the suburbs. Country music, more than any other format, is the direct beneficiary of this change.

As Americans aged and moved to the suburbs, they became increasingly interested in themes that have long been the mainstay of Nashville songwriters. While most pop music was still focused on sex, drugs and other forms of license ("I Want Your Sex," to pick one example, or "Losing My Religion"), country pounded out tales of love, heartache, family ties and middle-aged renewal. In one of Garth Brooks's most successful songs, for example, "Unanswered Prayers," a man returns to a hometown football game with his wife, where together they run into his old high-school flame. Just as he starts to regret having lost the girlfriend, he realizes that she is not as lovely as he had remembered. "And as she walked away/ I looked at my wife/ And then and there I thanked the good Lord/ For the gifts in my life."

Brooks, more than almost any other country singer, is a master of this kind of mid-life ballad, a sort of fanfare for the reconciled. He has mixed songs of middle-aged angst ("If Tomorrow Never Comes" is about a man wondering if his wife, or is it his daughter?, will know how much he loved her if he dies in the night) with raucous, feel-good party anthems, like "Friends In Low Places." And he has brewed these together into an upbeat pop sensibility that is perfectly pitched to his audience. When U2's Bono disrupted the Grammy telecast in 1994, announcing that he intended to "fuck the mainstream," Garth Brooks followed up with a speech taking offense at this pledge. "The message I would send to the youth is not to screw up the mainstream," he said later, "but work with it to make it what you want."

What has solidified Brooks's connection to the audience is that he, like so many other country artists these days, is one of them. A middle-class native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, recently ranked the most demographically "typical" city in America, Brooks graduated from Oklahoma State University with a degree in advertising. Vince Gill grew up in a suburb of Oklahoma City (typical city number eight), where his father was a lawyer. Trisha Yearwood's father was the vice president of a bank. Both Mary-Chapin Carpenter and Marcus Hummon grew up overseas: Carpenter's father worked for *Life* magazine, Hummon's for the Agency for International Development. We've come a long way from the days of coal miners' daughters.

The fact that all of these performers—college-educated, worldly, as influenced by Dan Fogelberg as by Hank Williams—could find a home in Nashville in the '90s also speaks to another new phenomenon in American life: the revitalization of the American South. From pariah region—hot, isolated, poor, racist—the South has emerged over the last thirty years as the chief engine of growth and change in American life. First the population shifted South (3,000,000 people since 1975 alone), drawn by service jobs and air-conditioned suburbs. Then, politics—especially Republican politics—followed. (See "The Southern Coup," by Michael Lind, TNR, June 19, 1995.) And now, in what just might be the final frontier of what Lind calls the "creeping Southernization of America," the pop cultural form most closely associated with the South—country music—has crept into the mainstream of American culture.

This cultural takeover has been abetted by non-traditional technologies pioneered to a large degree by a Southerner, Ted Turner, whose WTBS, TNT and eventually CNN paved the way for the widespread dissemination of new information about the South not controlled by New York or Los Angeles. Two cable channels in particular—TNN, The Nashville Network; and CMT, Country Music Television—with their sexy videos and telegenic stars, were instrumental in what has become country music's greatest coup in the last decade: its encroachment on the previously hostile youth market. According to *Radio & Records*, the percentage of country music listeners between 12 and 17 has tripled since 1988; the percentage between 18 and 24 has increased by half. Forty-three percent of Americans between 18 and 34 now listen to country music.

"When I first started in country radio back in 1971," says *R&R*'s Helton, "you had to convince people that country music didn't cause cancer. People in that [younger] age group always had a very negative connotation of country. It wasn't just neutral; it was negative. So for the first time ever we've gone from having a whole generation of people having a negative view to one with a positive view. We didn't even go through neutral; we went right to positive." The long-term importance of this trend is clear: country has secured its place in the mainstream for the next two generations, since recent pop history shows that as people grow older they return to the sounds of their youth.

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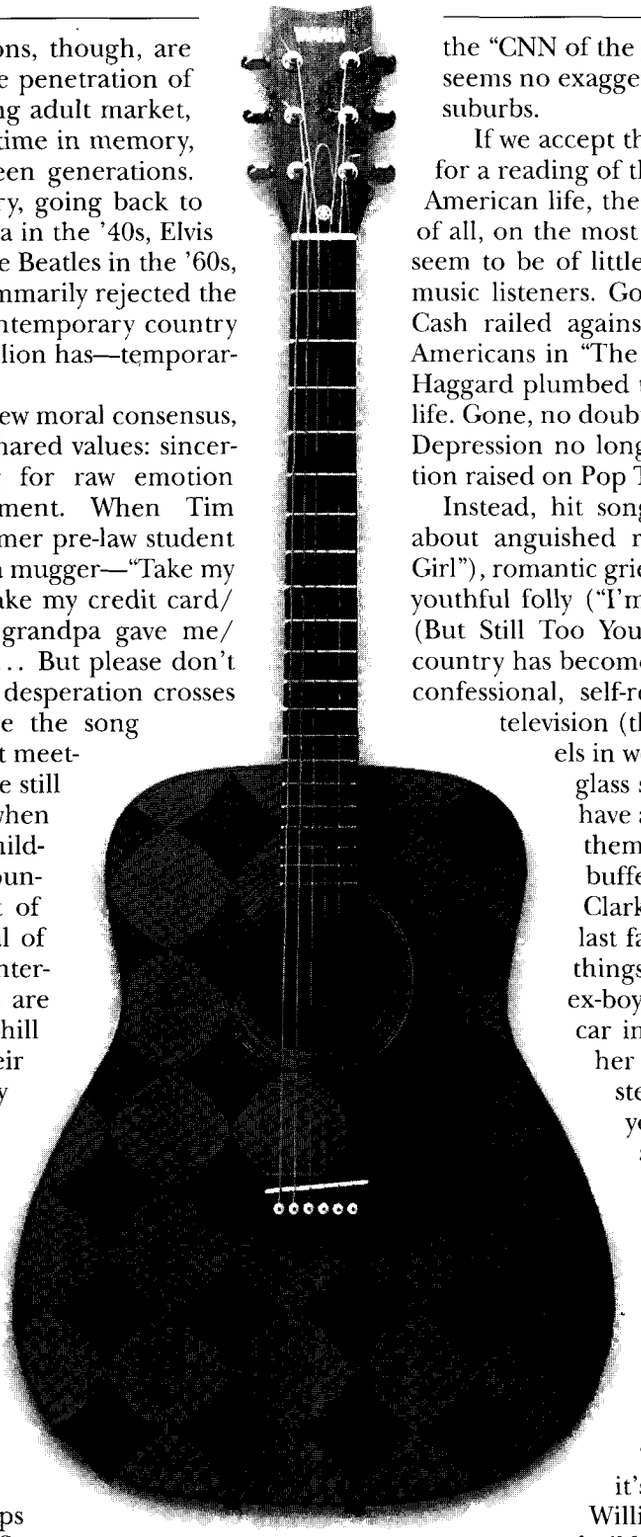
The short-term implications, though, are even more striking. With the penetration of country music into the young adult market, popular music, for the first time in memory, is no longer a wedge between generations. For much of the last century, going back to jazz in the '20s, Frank Sinatra in the '40s, Elvis in the '50s and, of course, the Beatles in the '60s, each new generation has summarily rejected the music of its elders. With contemporary country music that urge toward rebellion has—temporarily, at least—stalled.

What has replaced it is a new moral consensus, coalescing around certain shared values: sincerity, earnestness, a longing for raw emotion instead of ironic detachment. When Tim McGraw, the 28-year-old former pre-law student from Louisiana, pleads with a mugger—"Take my money/ Take my wallet/ Take my credit card/ Here's the watch that my grandpa gave me/ Here's the key to my car/ ... But please don't take the girl"—the sense of desperation crosses generations, especially since the song carries us from the boy's first meeting with the girl when they're still kids to the painful moment when he nearly loses her during childbirth. The true appeal of country music is in the content of these stories. And the moral of the stories is simple and counter-revolutionary: family values are sexy—not only for over-the-hill hippies who already had their fun and are well on their way to regret, but for their children as well. Some may find that embrace of the status quo frightening. But before you rush to judgment, consider the outlines of those values themselves.



Digging for cultural clues in an admittedly "feel-good" music is dodgy at best and perhaps even misleading at worst. Songs that become hits these days are songs that make it on the radio, and radio, at its core, is concerned with selling groceries, not records, and certainly not political causes. After all, how much cultural imagery can be found in the kind of music that opines, as one hit song did last fall: "If the world had a front porch/ Like we did back then/ We'd still have our problems/ But we'd all be friends"?

The answer is, more than you think. If, as Public Enemy's Chuck D has famously asserted, rap music is the "CNN of the ghetto," then country music, it seems no exaggeration to say, is the CNN of the suburbs.

If we accept this label, and look to the music for a reading of this increasingly potent force in American life, the news is decidedly mixed. First of all, on the most basic level, politics themselves seem to be of little interest to suburban country music listeners. Gone are the days when Johnny Cash railed against the mistreatment of Native Americans in "The Ballad of Ira Hayes" or Merle Haggard plumbed the darkness of his own prison life. Gone, no doubt, because those children of the Depression no longer seem relevant to a generation raised on Pop Tarts and sit coms.

Instead, hit songs these days are more often about anguished relationships ("One Boy, One Girl"), romantic grief ("My Next Broken Heart") or youthful folly ("I'm Old Enough to Know Better (But Still Too Young to Care)"). In many ways country has become the pop music parallel to the confessional, self-referential talk-show boom on television (though without that genre's revels in weirdness). Even old beer-in-the-glass staples, such as breakup songs, have a pampered middle-class feel to them these days, a coating of freshly buffed self-esteem. Newcomer Terri Clark, for example, had a smash hit last fall with a song that listed all of things she'd rather do than see her ex-boyfriend, including washing her car in the rain, checking the air in her tires and straightening her stereo wires. "I'd love to talk to you/ But then I'd miss Donahue." Patty Loveless weighed in with a song about trying to forget her ex-lover. "I try to think about Elvis/Memphis/Oprah in the afternoon." And later, "I try to think about hair-do's/ Tattoos/ Sushi bars and saxophones." Say what you will about the old hard-edged "twang" in country music, but it's hard to imagine Hank Williams Sr. watching Ricki Lake and nibbling pickled ginger.

When social issues do come up, they invariably relate to domestic turmoil—alcoholism, child abuse, spousal abuse—rather than, in any overt way, class, race or poverty. In country music today, anxiety is a personal matter. The threat is not across the ocean or even on the other side of the harvest; it's on the street where you live, in what Mary-Chapin Carpenter calls this "House of Cards": "I grew up in a town like this/ You knew the names of every street/ On the surface it looked so safe/ But it was perilous underneath." Per-

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haps the most startling example of this new trend is Martina McBride's defiant hit, "Independence Day." In this tune, named 1995 "Song of the Year" by the Country Music Association (CMA), a battered woman decides to burn down her house with her husband in it. "Let the weak be strong/ Let the right be wrong/ Throw the stone away/ Let the guilty pay/ It's Independence Day." This song, like many in the new social landscape, was written by a woman.

With so much peril in one's midst, perhaps it's not surprising that fewer people are prepared to go out of their way to solve the problems of others. A good example of this passivity is the glaring absence of any black performers—or black themes—in country music. The Simmons data suggest that around 25 percent of African Americans over 18 are listening to country radio. But not since Charley Pride snuck onto the scene in the 1960s by deliberately omitting his picture from his album cover has Nashville launched a single black country music performer. The one performer even given a chance, Cleve Francis, a 50-year-old cardiologist from Alexandria, Virginia, quit his medical practice several years ago to pursue a record contract, only to encounter a response so chilly that he retreated to the operating room.

There is some evidence, however, of a new openness about another hot-button issue, homosexuality. Country music has long been associated with conservative values (remember the "Ballad of the Green Berets" or "Okie from Muskogee") and, specifically, with the Republican Party. Richard Nixon, feeling the heat of the Watergate scandal, opened the new Grand Ole Opry facilities in 1974 by singing "God Bless America" and "Happy Birthday" to his wife, Pat. The country radio station in Washington, D.C., still "pauses to honor America" every day at noon with a broadcast of the National Anthem. It comes as no surprise, then, that homosexuality has long been a taboo subject. When rumors circulated that Randy Travis might be gay, he married his manager and moved to Hawaii.

But even that stigma seems to be weakening. Nashville has been fairly aggressive on the subject of AIDS. Reba McEntire had a hit single, "She Thinks His Name Was John," about a woman who contracts HIV from unprotected sex. Even Garth Brooks placed himself squarely in the gay-rights corner with his protest song, "We Shall Be Free." Then, in a turn of events that surprised almost everyone, Ty Herndon, a newcomer who was arrested last June for exposing himself to a (male) undercover officer in a Fort Worth park, managed to resume his seemingly crippled career after getting the charges dropped and spending time in a drug treatment center. If country music fans are prepared to overlook such private transgressions in deference to public performance, can Washington be far behind?

This new broad-minded attitude—sort of family values lite, or what one label executive jokingly characterized to me as "fiscally conservative, socially liberal, just like Colin Powell"—also extends to women. For much of its history, country music has been a gender-polarized world, in which 75 percent of the performers were men, and 75 percent of the buyers were women. Those women who did break through were advised not to be too sexy, too threatening or too defiant of convention. One of the most popular songs in the history of country music is Tammy Wynette's beleaguered anthem, "Stand By Your Man."

But these days old prejudices are falling almost daily. Tanya Tucker and Wynonna both have children out of wedlock. Mary-Chapin Carpenter planted a kiss on the lips of Little Richard at the 1994 CMA Awards, a startling act for a white woman and a black man that would have been unthinkable in the country world just a few years ago. And this year's superstar of the decade, Shania Twain, has marketed herself as the embodiment of (wholesome) sexuality, even hiring John and Bo Derek to spice up her image. For Twain, and her millions of fans, the message these days is "Stand By *Me*": "Any man of mine better be proud of me/ Even when I'm ugly he still better love me/ And I can be late for a date that's fine/ But he better be on time." Hillary Clinton—who once cited "Stand By Your Man" as the motto of a life not worth living—would be proud.

Which brings us to the final frontier of country's chauvinism—and perhaps the most remarkable innovation in its new mainstream family values: the definition of the modern man. It used to be said that the bulk of country songs were about drinkin', cheatin' and truck drivin'—the Holy Trinity of the Angry White Male. These days big-rig songs have all but disappeared. Two-timin' tales usually wind up in the third verse accompanied by a tearful plea for forgiveness or twelve-step redemption. And the beer and billiard boasts are few and far between. "Well I don't drink as much as I used to," opened one recent Alan Jackson hit. "Lately it just ain't my style." Instead the hard-drinkin', girl-chasin' good ol' boy has been supplanted by a new standard, Brooks & Dunn's ever-lovin', Hallmark-totin' "Brand New Man": "I used to have a wild side/ They say a country mile wide/ I'd burn those beer joints down/ That's all changed now/ You turned my life around/ ... I'm a brand new man."

In a climate where politicians of all stripes are concerned about the apathy, the anxiety and the downright "funk" of the American people, political leaders would be well-advised to take a clue from the vitality and quiet optimism of today's country music, where morality is hip, despair is surmountable and struggling to save a relationship (even one with a lot of "stress," as Newt Gingrich recently said of his own), is the national sport of the day.

"For men *and* women, equal footing is new," explains Bill Davis, deputy director of the Country Music Foundation. "Women don't have to pander to men, and men, well, they don't have to live up to John Wayne anymore."

So what is the message to men—especially male politicians—instead?

"Go home to your wife." •

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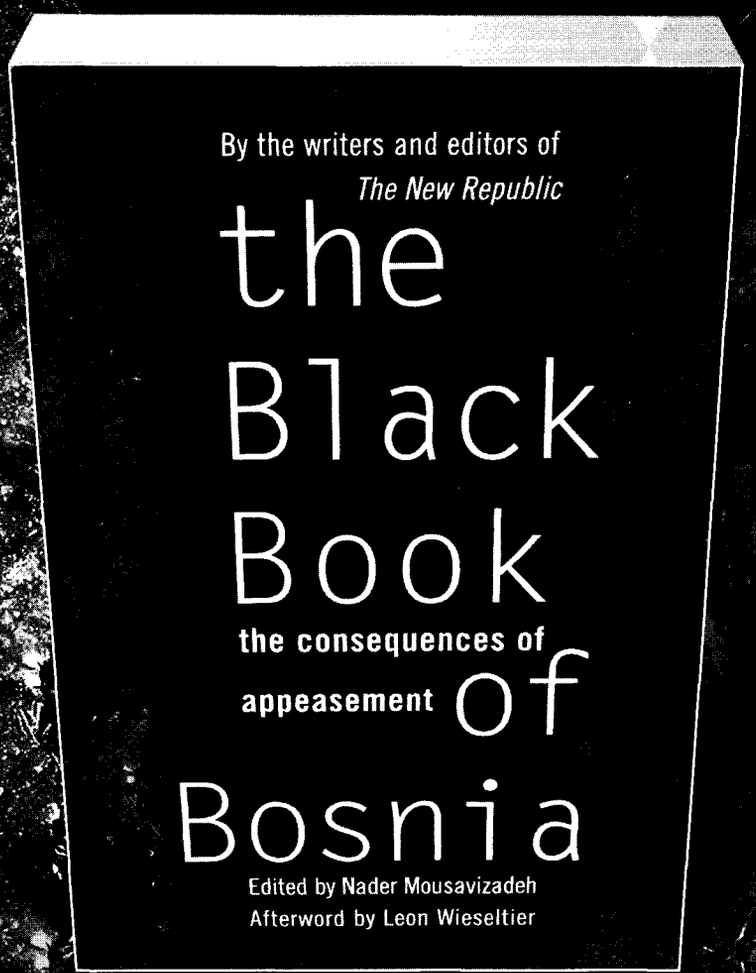
Why are we in Bosnia?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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Exit Marches

Capital punishment, resurging in these days of resurging family values, is treated in two films from two countries. Different impulses spurred these films, but they have at least one point in common: both of them detail minutely the method of execution.

Dead Man Walking (Gramercy) takes its title from the words called out by the leading guard of the group conveying a prisoner to the death chamber in a Louisiana prison. The screenplay by Tim Robbins derives from the book by Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J. Sister Helen, busy with social work and teaching in a New Orleans housing project, gets a letter from a man on death row in the penitentiary at Angola. She replies. Eventually she visits him, though the idea is frowned upon by officials and the prison chaplain.

The prisoner, Matthew Poncelet, was convicted for participating with another man in the murder of a youth and a girl after raping the girl. Poncelet maintains that he was merely present while the other man, drunk and drugged, did the dirty work. That man has been sentenced to life, not death.

Sister Helen sees a lawyer who tries to get Poncelet's sentence altered, without success. So Sister Helen's visits come to have a purely spiritual purpose. For his soul's sake, she urges Poncelet to face the truth about his part in the crimes, and at nearly the last moment, he does.

Interwoven with her pilgrimages to the prison are flashbacks of the horrendous night when the crimes occurred. Those flashbacks continue right through the sequence of Poncelet's lethal injection, as if Robbins, who directed the film, wants to be evenhanded, balancing punishment and crime. Instead this attempt at balance obfuscates matters. Is Robbins telling us that capital punishment is barbaric? Or that certain crimes justify it? Or that the criminal fundamentally wants to be punished in order to atone? The picture is cloudy in intent.

That cloudiness is deepened by Susan Sarandon's performance as Sister Helen. If she were giving the role what it seems to demand, a glow of true religious light, the film would have some organic cohesion, a strong spiritual cord running through it. But Sarandon does little more than present her face—Robbins is fond of huge close-ups—and speak her lines with tepid conviction. She has enlivened a lot of widely varying roles in the past, but spiritual fervor, without which her part here is only rhetorical, seems beyond her.

Sean Penn plays Poncelet. He's abrasive enough, but for an actor of talent, it's an easy part, all snarls and cigarettes. Except for the execution sequence, where he gets near something genuine, Penn is mostly just enjoying the chance to be nasty and strange.

The performance I'll remember is by Raymond J. Barry as the father of the murdered boy, taciturn and shaken.

The Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski is best known—celebrated would not be too strong a word—in this country for his trilogy, *Red, White, Blue*; but in Europe he is at least equally well-known for an earlier work, a series of ten films made for Polish TV called *Dekalog* (*The Ten Commandments*). Each of the ten pictures looks at one of the commandments in a contemporary Polish light. One of the series was shown at the New York Film Festival in 1989 and is just now released here—**A Short Film About Killing** (Film Polski). Written with Krzysztof Piesiewicz, it deals with two killings: a murder and the state's execution of the murderer. To preclude any doubts about subject and atmosphere, Kieslowski opens under a gray sky in a grimy city square with a group of boys running merrily away from the camera. The focus shifts slightly to the right, and in close-up we see a cat hanging by its neck—the merry boys' merry prank.

This shot does more than set the tone; it also establishes a key aspect of Kieslowski's framing. He very much likes close-ups of something large—here the dead cat—past which we see something relevant. Kieslowski's visual ingenuity, ceaseless and occasionally helpful, later includes such shots as peering under someone's arm into a café.

The film quickly establishes three characters who, at first, have nothing to do with one another: a young lawyer taking a *viva voce* bar exam and expressing doubts about prisons and executions; a middle-aged taxi driver of misanthropic bent; a 21-year-old youth wandering aimlessly around the city. In the

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Carrington. *Not greatly moving but highly intelligent. Emma Thompson as the painter who fell in love with the homosexual Lytton Strachey (Jonathan Pryce). Acutely written, directed, acted. (Reviewed 12/4/95)* **Lamerica.** *An Italian con man in Albania in the early '90s. Deeply probing, graphic, honest past usual honesty. Gianni Amelio, who made "Stolen Children," proves further that he is an artist of humane significance. (1/29/96)* **Nixon.** *Oliver Stone, flamboyant and tempestuous as ever, historically idiosyncratic, cinematically overwhelming. Anthony Hopkins heads a perfect cast. (1/22/96)* **Sense and Sensibility.** *Emma Thompson again (thank heaven)—this time the screenwriter as well as the marvelous leading actress. The result is less for Austen purists than for Thompson purists, but the pleasures here are plentiful. (1/8&15/96)*—**SK**

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course of a day, the lawyer passes the exam and rejoices with his fiancée; the taxi driver, who is choosy about his fares, picks up the youth; the youth asks him to drive to a lonely suburb and there murders him.

The details of the murder are salient in the director's design. From behind, the youth swiftly winds a rope around the driver's neck and garrotes him, not quite successfully. He then puts a cloth over the driver's head, drags him from the car, and though the driver is still alive, still pleading, beats in his skull with an iron bar. Robbery is not the motive. There is no motive, a point that Kieslowski wants to make even more stark by articulating the murder.

Something like a year passes, which we can infer because the lawyer now has a son. He has been assigned to defend the youth, whose *acte* was merely *gratuit.* (Cause is slenderly implied through the fact that the youth's young sister, whom he adored, was killed in an accident a few years back, and he has been morose ever since.) The lawyer loses the case and is dispirited, both because he lost and because he does not believe in capital punishment.

He visits the youth in prison and is present at the execution. We have seen the noose and the trap being tested. As in *Dead Man Walking,* we watch a group of guards seize the condemned man and pull him along a corridor; and, as in the other picture, the youth collapses (though he hasn't been defiant like Poncelet). They put a hood on his head, as he did with his victim, so we don't see his features as he hangs, though we do see the reason for putting a pan under the trap.

This picture, too, is unclear in idea. Is Kieslowski saying that all killing is equally atrocious, whether senseless or (at least in law) reasoned? If his stand is absolute—against all killing—then soldiers are murderers and, if they survive a war, ought to be punished. If this is not his belief, then what is he proposing—especially in a case like this? Life imprisonment? I've read statements by more than one lifer about the questionable mercy of that sentence. Psychiatric treatment? If so, then Poland, unlike most other countries I've read about, is equipped to do more than make token obeisance to such treatment.

What's finally significant about both the Robbins and Kieslowski films is that neither is a clear polemic against capital punishment, such as Cayatte's *We Are All Murderers* (1952) and Wise's *I Want to Live* (1958). Robbins and Kieslowski put the sufferings of the executed men on the same plane of agony as those of the victims. Then what *are* these two directors saying? Besides, fair-mindedness has a paradoxical result. Both films, though seriously intended, end up somewhat exploitive of brutalities.

Nixon Note. Another visit to *Nixon* confirmed my admiration for it as filmmaking but also made me ashamed. Reviewing it a few weeks ago, I hadn't praised Anthony Hopkins enough. His performance is immense in two aspects: huge in its acting resources, huge in the Atlas-like way, without strain, that he supports the whole film. And his acting has a strange uniqueness. I can't remember another performance that triumphed so fully through the portrayal of discomfort. Hopkins's Nixon is uncomfortable when victorious or defeated, when joyous or worried. He even embraces his wife clumsily. Hopkins creates a man unhappy in his body and being, struggling throughout for ease in himself, wrecking conventions and ethics in this struggle. Former associates of this president are now telling us that the film does not portray the "real" Nixon. Few of us have knowledge of the private man. What we can say is that Hopkins's performance fits the man who was publicly visible for all those years. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

Stars and Their Gasses

The Broadway audience, having lost any interest in serious plays, is reviving an old love for star vehicles. Terrence McNally's **Master Class** is the latest of these capably written, efficiently constructed, ultimately disposable contraptions. It is a big commercial hit, and will probably maintain its lease on the John Golden Theatre until at least the close of the century. It will amass all those year-end prizes that redden the cheeks of selection committees once the smoke clears and taste is ruled by reason. It will momentarily satisfy the product-hunger of a dozen play-starved resident theaters. And it will no doubt be made into a major motion picture with Academy Award potential for the leading actress (possibly Barbra Streisand, who was scoping the property the evening I was there).

As I probably don't need to tell you by now, *Master Class* is a compilation of McNally's fan notes about the famous singing artist Maria Callas. And if what attracts you to opera is the private life of the diva rather than her vocal gifts, then you will enjoy this biographical sketch a lot more than I did. Which is not to say that I didn't enjoy it. I have a certain respect for efficiency, and the play, after all, is expertly directed, crisply designed and uniformly well-acted (by a cast of six). Zoe Caldwell, as Callas, is especially compelling, despite the fact that she looks and sounds less like a fiery Greek soprano (her accent evaporated after a few halfhearted runs) than like Lillian Hellman, the literary gorgon she last impersonated on Broadway. (Caldwell now wears a wig of flowing black tresses, but somehow she still seems stiffly permed.)

This is one of those big bravura performances that will remind you of the days, if you're old enough to remember them, when show business was dominated by great ladies—that prehistoric period, in Christopher Durang's immortal phrase, "When Dinah Shore Ruled the Earth." On Broadway, these were the female legends who now have theaters named after them—Ethel Barrymore, Katherine Cornell, Helen Hayes—those larger-than-life icons with booming voice boxes and fanatical fan clubs, who managed to inhabit their couturier-made roles without unduly distracting you from the allure of their public personalities.

As a matter of fact, McNally's portrait of Callas as a visiting teacher reminded me a lot of another great theatrical figure with a stentorian voice, whose latter-day terror of the stage did not prevent her from also terrifying students—Stella Adler. McNally's conceit finds Callas holding a master class at Julliard, as she did in the early '70s (and as Adler did at Yale in the '60s) displaying (unlike Adler) a lot more interest in her fabled past than in her feeble pupils. When Caldwell strides on stage in her first showy entrance, decked out in a navy-blue pants suit and brightly colored silk scarf, a ribbon of rouge smeared over her lips, she silences the tumultuous reception she receives as a celebrated actress with the businesslike manner of the diva-teacher ("No applause, we're here to work"), then goes on to lecture the audience as if it were a bunch of Julliard auditors.

The "work" she speaks of has less to do with training students than with

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browbeating them, interspersing cutting comments on their talents with generally mundane reflections on the relation of the singer to the song ("You must be willing to subjugate yourself to the music. The composer is God"), the nature of professionalism ("Art is beauty and you should be paid for it"), the sanctity of art ("The stage, the theater, are sacred places") and the quality of her competition ("How can you have rivals when no one else can do what you can do?"). If these quotes are accurate, they confirm the astrophysical principle that stars emit an awful lot of gas.

Still, these and other issues she raises seem less important as ideas than as reflections of her badgering, self-regarding, oddly engaging temperament. The first student Callas encounters, an insensitive, homely young soprano in a ghastly pink frock, is allowed to sing no more than a single note before Callas ("Stop right there!") is criticizing her posture and her diction ("I'm not hearing any consonants, you're singing in Sanskrit"). A young tenor she admires as a *bella figura* (his idol is Mario Lanza) moves her to tears when she finally allows him to perform an aria from Tosca ("Great music always takes so much out of me"). Another soprano, a majestic black woman (powerfully sung and acted by Audra McDonald), is scorned for her overly accessorized green evening gown ("This is a master class, not some Cinderella's ball") and leaves the recital hall in tears. Later she returns, having thrown up in the ladies' room, to perform Lady Macbeth's letter scene, which allows Callas to expostulate on entrances ("Everything!") and sense memory ("Feel the stones beneath the floorboards!"), and to claim the credit for the student's improved abilities.

Clearly McNally is not trying to demonstrate what a great mentor Callas was at Julliard—though reports suggest her teaching was more helpful than appears here—so much as to create affectionate satire out of her fake humility and imperious manner. Only later, at the conclusion of the first act, does he get around to dramatizing the personal wounds that lie festering beneath the skin of all the rampant egotism. The trouble with focusing on a single flamboyant character is that it robs the action of purpose, creating a situation where there's very little at stake. (Compare this cameo with another portrait of a suffering opera singer, Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise*, where everything is at stake.) Little is asked of us as audience except to share the playwright's feelings for his idol, and any emotion we might experience is largely provided by opera recordings.

These musical selections are used as background for internal soliloquies during which the lights dim, the stage of La Scala is projected on the back wall, and Callas, listening to her own voice on record, reflects on her life as a diva, her liaison with Aristotle Onassis and her faded career. Near the end of the second act, she remembers her first husband (and agent), Giovanni Battista Meneghin, her weight problem and her dawning love for Ari, as the speaker system blares an aria from a Callas rendering of *Macbeth*.

Like the arias sung by the students, this powerful music, climaxing with the recorded roars of her admirers, swamps us into thinking that something momentous has been happening on stage. But Verdi, Puccini and the sound engineer have been doing the work of the playwright. In a sense, Zoe Caldwell is doing the playwright's work as well, and so is Len Foglia, the director. Their command of their craft helps persuade us that there's a lot more going on in this play than McNally has put there, and Caldwell's voice—an amplified English horn aspirated with wheezes—gives considerable depth to lines that might look flat on the page.

Although Callas remarks, "There are no shortcuts in art," McNally is not averse to taking a few artistic shortcuts himself. And although *Master Class*, like his previous *Lisbon Traviata*, is animated by the playwright's unquestionable love for bel canto opera and tempestuous divas, it is not a fully realized work. As a tribute to Callas, the play has some value as the kind of homage that one performance art can pay to another. As a piece of theater, it is essentially an aromatic bouquet for a star-struck, celebrity-bit culture. *Master Class* employs all the strategems of the stage except its capacity to evoke danger, surprise and reality.

John Webster's **The Duchess of Malfi** is full of those qualities, but it is a fearfully difficult play to put on stage. Lit by fitful lightning, this Jacobean Guignol proceeds, in contrast with the easy flow of Shakespearean blank verse, in jerks and spasms. It is a densely packed anthology of homilies, proverbialisms, epigrams, couplets and Latinisms that could tongue-tie the most fluent of actors (one commentator calls Webster "sublime by the aid of a commonplace book"). It also describes a world where the boundaries between good and evil, innocence and guilt, have virtually disappeared and where about the only virtue left to admire is courage in the face of death. Indeed, death and decay—what Eliot called "the skull beneath the skin"—constitute Webster's primary subjects. For that reason, the fatality-averse Shaw dismissed him as a "Tussaud laureate." However apt this description, the criminal waxworks Webster created here and in *The White Devil* still have the power to shock and to terrify.

The title character of *The Duchess of Malfi* is almost unique in Webster for having more virtues than vices; yet her goodness is allowed to command the stage for only four acts before she is slaughtered by her vengeful brothers, with one whole act left to go. The Duchess's untimely death helps to wrap the action in a membrane of almost unrelieved evil blistered by charnel-house imagery. For this, the recent plague in London was no doubt partially responsible. But the gloomy atmosphere of the play also reflected the generalized Stuart pessimism shared by all of Webster's contemporaries (Shakespeare included) as contrasted with the boundless Marlovian aspiration of Tudor England. Donne described this morbid period, in his "First Anniversary" poem, as a time of fragmentation, incoherence and collapse ("If man were anything, he's nothing now"). Later Joyce was to characterize it as "an age of exhausted whoredom groping for its God."

The production that Declan Donnellan recently brought to the Brooklyn Academy of Music with his Cheek by Jowl company was a generous mixture of the sacred and the profane. Set in the '20s, during the period of Mussolini Fascism, the play sat very comfortably amid its modern trappings, as the characters drank cocktails, smoked cigarettes and murdered each other in a variety of ingenious ways—once with a poisoned Bible, a wonderful symbol of the play's corrupt Catholicism. Indeed, the atmosphere was drenched in Catholic liturgy—even the madmen torturing the Duchess sang a Gloria. Contemporary moralists, Hamlet among them, thought a widow's desire to remarry was a sign of lasciviousness ("they are most luxurious who marry twice"). Webster's innovation was to treat this instinct as perfectly normal.

Donnellan's innovation, by contrast, was to regard the virtuous Duchess, and her rather stiff consort Antonio, as something less than models of purity. Matthew Macfadyen's Antonio appeared to be a rather chilly self-regarding narcissist. The Duchess, played by the strawberry-blond Anastasia Hille in the tarty "what-a-dump" tradition of Bette Davis and Faye Dunaway, was a willful, imperious, tempestuous and deeply neurotic aristocrat—a provocative flapper in a variety of designer gowns who plays hard, drinks hard, screws hard and smokes like a chimney.

As for Bosola, played by George Anton with a harsh Scottish burr, he was a cold precisionist blackshirt, a voyeur of suffering who followed the Duchess's fate with the fascination of a graduate student researching nihilism. When she

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lit one last cigarette before being strangled and said, "I am Duchess of Malfi still," Bosola was dazzled by her style. Her stoical contempt for death was never dreamt of in his philosophy. Paul Brennan's cold-hearted, sexually depraved Cardinal was the physical and moral double of Cardinal Pacelli, later Pope Pius XII. Scott Handy's Duke Ferdinand was a spoiled booby whom everybody smacked and ridiculed, until he developed into a wolfish, incestuous madman, ravenous for his sister's blood.

Donnellan mounted the play on a bare stage, where the characters first appeared as frozen chess pieces before assuming a kind of frigid animation. Overlapping one scene with another in cinematic fashion, the director had all his actors performing in a state of Dostoyevskian brain-fever. It was a fitting style for Webster's Cimmerian vision. Trying to comfort the Duchess before he kills her, Bosola says, "Look ye, the stars shine still." But the heavens are cloudy and the stars are dim. Bosola, like everybody else in this grim and lacerating play, dies in a mist. •

A wonderful painter with no theory.

Homer's Epic

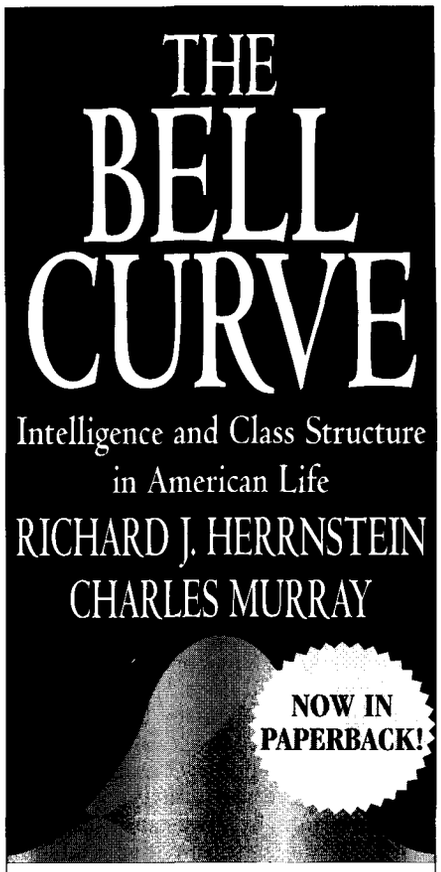
BY JOHN UPDIKE

The Winslow Homer exhibition that occupies thirteen rooms of the East Building of the National Gallery, before going on to Boston and New York, is one to make an American proud. Its 235 paintings and drawings form the pictorial record of a progress from humble, scratchy artistic beginnings to a triumphant, thunderous close, by a man whose formal art training was slight and who determinedly focused on the plain life and unadorned scenery of the democracy. Homer was painting's Melville, emerging from a kind of popular journalism into increasingly grand ambitions, but without the bitter truncation of Melville's career. Not just their shared fascination with the sea suggests the parallel, but a boyish readiness in their talents, a quickness of assimilation, a creative eagerness which gives a morning sense of the world grasped afresh. After the sequestered, shadowy intensities of Hawthorne and Poe, we enter, in *Typee* and *Moby-Dick*, far-flung American space.

Those museumgoers coming to the Homer show, as I did, from the Copley exhibit over in the West Wing must be struck by the sunny uncrowdedness of Homer's oils and canvases—the scattered croquet players of 1865-66, for instance, in dresses as stately as lonely pyramids, compared to Copley's interlocked family scenes, overflowing with flesh like bowls of carefully arranged fruit, or the stark muddy stretches of Homer's Civil War paintings compared to the crammed contortions of the expatriate painter's phantasmagoric *Death of Major Peirson.* Two artists from Boston: the one a colonial mastering the soft-edged, heavily coded visual proprieties of monarchical England, and the other, born a century later, bestowing a statuesque dignity upon country lasses in empty meadows. It is Homer's spareness, his leanness, his blunt clarity that make him so refreshing and made him, to his early critics, so disconcerting.

One early critic was Henry James, reviewing a New York Academy of Design exhibition of 1875. James, with Homer one of the few American artists to have had a career that feels complete, was struck by Homer's three entries in the show, and devoted words to him so wryly appreciative, so entertainingly troubled, that one is tempted to quote at length:

> Before Mr. Homer's barefoot urchins and little girls in calico sun-bonnets, straddling beneath a cloudless sky upon the national rail fence, the whole effort of the critic is instinctively to contract himself, to double himself up, as it were, so that he can creep into the problem and examine it humbly and patiently, if a trifle wonderingly. . . . Mr. Homer goes in, as the phrase is, for perfect realism, and cares not a jot for such fantastic hair-splitting as the distinction between beauty and ugliness. He is a genuine painter; that is, to see, and to reproduce what he sees, is his only care; to think, to imagine, to select, to refine, to compose, to drop into any of the intellectual tricks with which other people sometimes try to eke out the dull pictorial vision—all this Mr. Homer triumphantly avoids. He not only has no imagination, but he contrives to elevate this rather blighting negative into a blooming and honourable positive. . . . We frankly confess that we detest his subjects—his barren plank fences, his glaring, bald, blue skies, his big, dreary,



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vacant lots of meadows, his freckled, straight-haired Yankee urchins, his flat-breasted maidens, suggestive of a dish of rural doughnuts and pie, his calico sun-bonnets, his flannel shirts, his cowhide boots. He has chosen the least pictorial features of the least pictorial range of scenery and civilization; he has resolutely treated them as if they were pictorial, as if they were every inch as good as Capri or Tangier; and, to reward his audacity, he has incontestably succeeded.

This tangle of praise and blame arises from preconceptions long obsolete: the paintings that spelled beauty and imagination to James now loom to us as ugly—forced, formal concoctions redolent of stuffy patronage and devoid of plain-air truth. James's eye was too good not to see Homer's "great merit" of atmospheric fidelity: "He naturally sees everything at one with its envelope of light and air." That the painter, to achieve this merit, must brave the bleak outdoors and forsake the cluttered studio and the manipulated props of "imagination" James was too European to admit. He found, in fiction, his friend William Dean Howells too formless and Mark Twain far beyond the pale. He could never quell his sensation that there was something intrinsically unworthy in American subject matter. Only the pure dry American soul, caught in the toils of Old World corruption, pleased him; that soul's plain and provincial furniture he gratefully eased from his mind. Homer stayed with the furniture, and his year in France (1866-67) left so little trace of influence upon him as to baffle art historians. Some say it lightened his palette.

Boston of the 1850s, as Nicolai Cikovsky Jr. points out in his extensive catalogue commentary, had no art schools and so little artistic life that young Winslow Homer's resolve to be a painter amounted to an immaculate conception. He liked, he could only explain, "the smell of paint in a picture gallery." His amiable, affluent family indulged him, but the best his father could supply for training was to apprentice Winslow to a friend of his, the commercial lithographer John Buford. By the age of 21, Homer was contributing illustrations to periodicals, and by 1859 had moved to New York, to be closer to *Harper's Weekly* and his other sources of income. While there, he took some painting lessons. The Civil War (in which he did not otherwise serve) gave him a major commercial and artistic opportunity. He preferred, from the start, the medium of painting, and *The Sharpshooter on Picket Duty*, the first painting in this show and described by a friend of Homer's as "his very first picture in oils," preceded its appearance as an engraving in *Harper's Weekly* in November 1862.

As late as 1871, Homer was producing oils based on his memories and sketches of the war. They attracted good critical notice and serve as well as photographs to record the look of the war, but as paintings they are not very pleasing. They have a thin scrubby surface and a certain paint-by-number stiffness. The much-admired *Prisoners from the Front* (1866) is essentially an illustrated editorial, an elaborate cartoon in two colors, brown and pale blue. But Homer had the perspicuity—the American open-mindedness—to see that stretches of hoof-pocked mud and efforts to keep dry around a campfire on a rainy day were as much a part of war as battle. *The Veteran in a New Field* (1865) is his first symbolically potent simplification, the yellow wheatstalks slashed in with a daring freedom.

Thanks to Homer's habit of working in series—a distinctly modern method, Cikovsky claims, pregnant with implications of ultimate unknowability and irresolution—nearly each room presents a theme, whether of rural children, or tropical watercolors, or marine paintings. Familiar iconic triumphs greet us in many of the chambers, as well as the subtle variations that lead up and away from them. Homer's profession of illustrator, which he quit in 1875 upon deciding that he could make a living from his watercolors, taught him a contriver's thrift: he would use the same sketch in an engraving, and then in a painting, and then in another. Two paintings of croquet deploy two identical female figures, adding, or deleting, two less impressive figures in one version. The same standing milkmaid serves three different environments; a girl blowing a dinner horn had four incarnations. The most conspicuous, and most scandalously corporeal, wet-dressed bather in the ambitious *Eagle Head, Manchester, Massachusetts* (1870) appears, smaller and reversed, in that year's *By the Shore*; this latter painting stands out as showing more venturesome color, and a freer signature, than Homer had displayed hitherto.

The Eagle Head painting has the scale and finish and awkwardness of a studio work; the three monumental figures do not quite go together, and they are wringing out their attire in alarming proximity to a breaking wave. The smaller shore painting, and the two similarly sketchy scenes from 1869 (evidently once parts of a single long canvas), possess the unity of atmosphere James remarked upon and, at the edge of a dark, tumbling sea, a lovely brightness of activity, reflected and inverted in the saturated sand. We see people actually playing in the water and getting wet, rather than merely promenading as in the stately Eugene Boudin beach scenes of the same period.

Homer usually delivers a sense of genuine activity; if the maidens of his watercolors pose, they pose amid the tangible trappings of egg-gathering and apple-picking and haying, in barnyards and meadows unmistakably actual. *The Sick Chicken* (1874) is distinguished not only by its homely title but by the sun-and-shadow texture of the cluttered porch of a whitewashed farmhouse. In *Milking Time* (1875), the composition is startlingly dominated by the broad planks of a fence; in *Crossing the Pasture* (1872), the two boys are painted no more attentively than the silver pail and the branching switch that they carry as the tools of their chores.

By the time of this masterly work, Homer had come into his full stabbing, dabbing vocabulary of homegrown impressionism. The alleged roughness of his technique appears to our post-Impressionist, post-Fauve eyes as precise enough and appropriately sensitive to the surprises of light and the complements of local color. His way of spattering his grassy foregrounds with dabs of wildflower, as in *Crossing the Pasture* and *The Two Guides* (1875) is exhilarating and probably more exact, botanically, than we know. The water-growth in *An Adirondack Lake* (1870) and the anatomy of its great fallen tree trunk are rendered with intensity but without, say, Frederick Edwin Church's virtuoso stir. The details acutely seen do not disturb the tranquillity of the wide, mild vista and the modest figure of the guide: in this vast space he has his space, and no more.

Many of the mature Homer's faces are wooden or nonexistent; an animated individuality would have unbalanced the big picture. Not boys so much as boyishness forms the subject of the beautifully subdued *Seven Boys in a Dory* (1873) and the twice-painted *Snap the Whip*. Both versions of *Snap the Whip* date from 1872; in the smaller and later, the mountainous setting has been painted over with a lower horizon and a rather generalized, fluffy-clouded sky. The barefoot boys in their frieze of frozen violence are unchanged, and, with the little red schoolhouse behind, this image flirts with a Currier-and-Ives sentimentalization of the nation's rural youth, in the ever more urbanized and industrialized post-Civil War America. The viewer feels here, and before some of Homer's watercolors of pensive young shepherdesses, confronted with something remembered rather than observed.

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Considering the powerfully nostalgic effect these country scenes of the 1870s make upon us now, relatively few, however, feel calculated toward that effect. The resplendent, grave *Boys in a Pasture* (1874) and slightly earlier *The Nooning* (with the lovable dog that appeared in its engraved version in *Harper's Weekly* eliminated) seem primarily studies in outdoor atmosphere, the sun golden on the curved straw hats that leave the little boys' faces in shadow. The shadows in Homer are as important as the highlights; an instinctive dry detachment saved him from a theatrical doting. The much-reproduced *The New Novel* and *Blackboard* (both 1877) are tender, but from a tolerable distance. The watercolors (some with gouache) later in the decade, of bonneted girls and a young couple maneuvering over a stile, manage to be primarily examples of charmingly proficient painting and only secondarily representations of a fabulous innocence.

And yet he did, by 1881, need new fields and a new tone. He moved to England for a year, settling in the fishing village of Cullercoats on the North Sea, and embarked upon ambitious watercolors and charcoal sketches of women on the beach, or mending nets, or watching from windswept quays. These heroic female figures, of a studied Milletesque monumentality, represent a step back into the traditional European art that he had so elegantly ignored; remote from the spiritual politics of America's wistful relation with its own landscape, they bring a neo-Grecian hauteur, a formidable coldness, into Homer's work. The sea, from now on, will exercise a pull that rarely lets go, whether manifested in the greenish waters of Florida and the Caribbean or the storm-roiled waves of the stony Northeast.

In 1883 Homer moved his permanent residence to Prout's Neck, in Maine, and built a studio on a cliff, and turned his back on the civilized world, painting little but the sea and its human dependents and the watery wilderness of the Adirondacks. Of two spectacular large sea-scenes from the mid-'80s, *The Life Line* (1884) seems a bit melodramatic, monochromatic and, in its death-defying coupling, ill-defined, but *Undertow* (1886), displayed with many preliminary sketches, is a masterpiece arising whole from all its labors of contrivance. It was based, evidently, on a successful rescue that Homer witnessed in Atlantic City in 1883; if the two young women are not dead but unconscious it removes something of tragedy from the scene, but heightens the eroticism. Have any painted figures ever been more thoroughly in the water than these?

Homer hired two models, it was alleged by his biographer William Howe Downes, and on the roof of his studio building in New York kept throwing water over the hapless females, "so that the effect of the sun on the wet clothing and the bare arms as well as the faces and hair should be entirely in accordance with the natural appearance of the group emerging from the surf." Even knowing this, we do not feel any absurdity, as we so often do when the conscientious research behind an anecdotal painting shows through. Though *The Herring Net* (1885) and *Taking an Observation* (1886), with their slickered male figures, make an easier entrance into our appreciation, *Undertow* has a willed magnificence and integrated brilliance that rank this artist—so modern in much of his work—with the most resolute of nineteenth-century academic masters. As a reviewer for the *Boston Evening Transcript* put it, "In it as many obstacles have been overcome as usually are resisted by most painters in a lifetime." The *Transcript* reviewer found the subject unworthy of the labor, but the tableau of the two half-drowned intertwined beauties with their pair of half-naked rescuers speaks in epic, mythic resonances. It is a pre-Raphaelite vision, with muscles. The two rescuers avert their faces as if from a blinding

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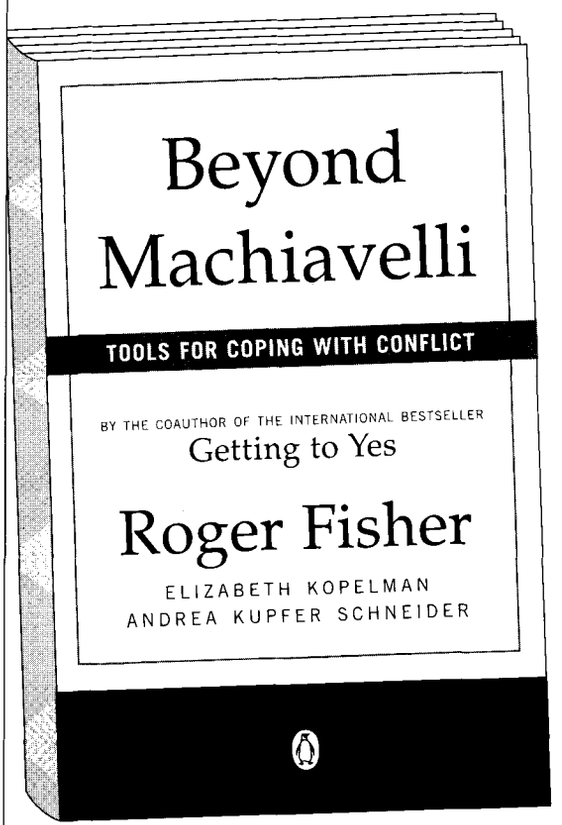

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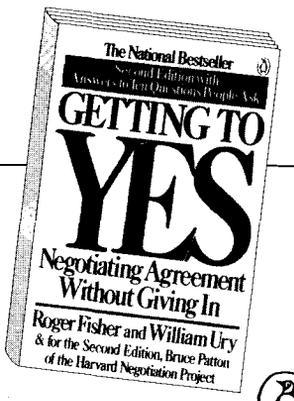
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mystery, the great Romantic mystery of life-in-death, as the two swooned (and hence sexually defenseless) females lock in a Sapphic embrace.

Homer's life-long aesthetic drive toward a freighted simplicity and a potent symbolism produced a rather ungainly series of watercolors of leaping trout from 1889 and the 1890s. The fish are unimpeachably painted, but unreal in their stilled motion and, taken with their backgrounds, optically disturbing. Human visual experience, achieved through constant unconscious focal readjustments, allows a painting a generous depth of field—that is, the background and foreground, within limits, can both appear sharp. But the literalism of an Audubon, with a fish suspended in mid-air inches back from the picture plane, uneasily consorts with Homer's "envelope of light and air." *A Good Pool, Saguenay River* (1895) copes with the problem by rendering the fisherman, at the distance of an unreeling line, in the watercolor equivalent of soft focus. The effect remains tricky and even kitschy, amid the more conventionally perspectived paintings of the Adirondacks hunting and fishing milieu, not to mention the crystalline watercolors done in the full sunlight of Florida and Nassau.

Yet the impulse to come closer, to look the mystery square in the eye, is a brave one, and it finds fulfillment in the depopulated oil studies of rock and wave that Homer was to execute in his lonely, weather-lashed Prout's Neck studio. The canvases are so celebrated as to be notorious, yet they crash upon us, in the exhibit's last rooms, with an undulled impact. *Northeaster* (1895) and *Maine Coast* (1896), both flinging spume up on the left of their rectangles, and both permanently displayed at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, are best known. In the latter, the painter's attempt to render the creamy foam sliding and boiling through the dark rocks produces a veritable delirium of raw white slathered on with a palette knife. The green foam-webbed slope of *Northeaster* classically captures the ocean's terrible weight and oblivious, tumultuous sliding; an early version depicted two men in foul-weather gear on the rocks, but, though this version won a gold medal in Philadelphia, the men were painted out.

Nature without men was Homer's ultimate topic—the mindless roar at the heart of all, the "NO! in thunder" that Melville urged upon Hawthorne, the "All collapsed" which comes at the end of *Moby-Dick*. Homer's *Moonlight, Wood Island Light* (1894) portrays a calmer oceanic mood, but the foreground of breaking wave and gleaming rock is rendered in surpassingly violent brushwork, as are the slant rock surfaces of that same year's *High Cliff, Coast of Maine*, broken into fragments of color as if by the weariless pummeling of the waves. So precociously liberated in technique, *High Cliff* went unsold, and Homer, as if defiantly, signed it twice.

His sense, as he aged toward death, of a primal conflict, a central heartlessness, led him into allegory. *The Gulf Stream* (1899) is famous but on the edge of the absurd, with its overkill of sharks and waterspout. *Kissing the Moon* (1904) shows a *trompe-l'oeil* playfulness, and a style of painting heavy seas that has become a bit automatic. Sunsets along the sea's horizon become a theme, and *A Summer Night* (1890), with its great flakes of moonlight, has the nocturnal mysticism of a Ryder. The falling ducks of *Right and Left* (1909) and the fox and crows of *Fox Hunt* (1893) are surreal apparitions in which this most taciturn and secretive of painters seems to ask, at last, for literary interpretation. Expressive in more purely pictorial terms of his last mood are the hulking, bulbous cliffs of *Cape Trinity, Saguenay River* (1904-1909) and the precise, brooding cannon and portal and turret of *Searchlight on Harbor Entrance, Santiago de Cuba* (1901), silhouetted against a sea both moonlit and searchlit and, for once, flat calm.

Whatever his mood and materials, Homer worked them toward a consummate expression. The leading popular illustrator of his time, the best American watercolorist of all time, and a virile and experimental oil-painter whose work travelled from the pedestrian to the expressionistic and near-abstract, he was supremely pragmatic. There is in him a stunning, almost mad absence of two major presences in modern art: theory, and cities. In this show a single watercolor, *The Houses of Parliament* (1881), indicates an urban presence, a misty Thames view that makes us think of Whistler.

Whistler, the expatriate who wasted much of his talent on theorizing and on urban business, was the anti-type of his reclusive contemporary. With Homer, we feel no waste, just a succession of smaller or greater acts of possession, from the dazzlingly deft and dappled glimpse of two bonneted apple-pickers in *Apple Picking* (1878) to the oceanic appropriations of his later oils. (Among his feats might be listed the best, least caricatural portraits of post-bellum African Americans.) He beautifully exploited his talent and his days; a sense of strain and extravagance attends only the massive exclusion, from his art and increasingly his life, of what might be called Western civilization. To a degree no longer possible, he lived as the New World's new man—self-ruled, resourceful, and starting from scratch.

JOHN UPDIKE's new novel, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, has just been published by Knopf.

The brutal comedy of Anton Chekhov.

No More Mr. Nice Guy

BY JAMES WOOD

Chekhov's true outlines are blurred in glory, but it is a peculiar kind of Anglo-American glory, unfiery, decent and modest. By its light Chekhov is seen as an apostle of the religion of no religion, a writer with instincts rather than convictions, tact rather than force. Chekhov was loved by Raymond Carver, and just as Carver was called "our Chekhov," so Chekhov has become our Carver—a governor of ordinary states, whose inhabitants are hit by bolts of yearning, but who will learn eventually to accommodate such interruptions and abide by the local laws. The disturbances are not dangerous; they exist to prompt delicacy.

In 1927, the Anglo-Russian critic D.S. Mirsky, who did not care for Chekhov's work, argued that his popularity in England had to do with his "unusually complete rejection of what we may call the heroic values." Chekhov's air of gentle resignation, his belief in determinism and submission to it, said Mirsky, reminded the English soul of itself. Contemporary lovers of Chekhov still sound like Mirsky. Richard Gilman, in his otherwise sensitive study of the plays, writes of "Chekhov the sane, the lyricist of the prosaic." (It is one of the virtues of Gilman's book that he largely ignores this early characterization.) And here is Susan Sontag: "within the

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minor, modern emotional register, that of irony and melancholy, he irradiated modest conventions with a redemptive sanctity, truthfulness, and tact. In these stories there is no hysteria or compensatory solipsism of distress, no disrespect for the sensual, no improving judgments, no detachment."

Almost every word of Sontag's assessment is resistible. She robes Chekhov in negatives and praises him for his tact of avoidance, as if he were an excellent valet. But Chekhov is often hysterical; his very modern emotional register includes not only irony and melancholy, but also grief, joy, anxiety and revelation (just as his fictional world includes childbirth, death, fever, a duel, love, marriage, adultery, suicide, prostitution, wife-beating, incarceration and madness). While tending toward absolution, Chekhov nevertheless judges carefully. This writer of "no detachment" told a friend that "you should sit down to write only when you feel as cold as ice." This writer of "redemptive sanctity" once lamented that "in nature, the nasty caterpillar turns into a beautiful butterfly. But with people it's the other way round: out of a beautiful butterfly there comes a nasty caterpillar."

Anton Chekhov and His Times
Compiled and with an introduction
by Andrei Turkov
translated from the Russian
by Cynthia Carlile and Sharon McKee
(University of Arkansas Press, 327 pp., $38)

Chekhov's Plays: An Opening Into Eternity
by Richard Gilman
(Yale University Press, 261 pp., $30)

When Chekhov is returned to his Russianness, he seems much harder-edged. The Russian tradition as Chekhov absorbed it was emphatic, abrupt, grotesque, liturgical and almost cartoonish. The writers whom Chekhov mentions most often in his correspondence are Lermontov, Gogol and Tolstoy. The first is famous for Pechorin, the brave, bored and rebellious duelist of *A Hero Of Our Time*. From Gogol, Chekhov must have learned something about comic incongruities. From Tolstoy, he took a certain narrative impatience and a fondness for the explicit. To say as much is heretical nowadays. Gilman spends most of his supple book examining the suppleness of Chekhov, and he compares Chekhov's delicacy and avoidance of the explicit to Tolstoy's "strain and didacticism." But Chekhov is often explicit on behalf of his characters and, like his literary predecessors, is not afraid of the didactic. The brevity of his stories

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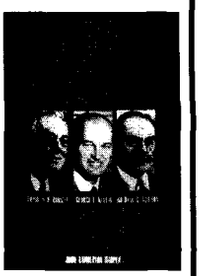

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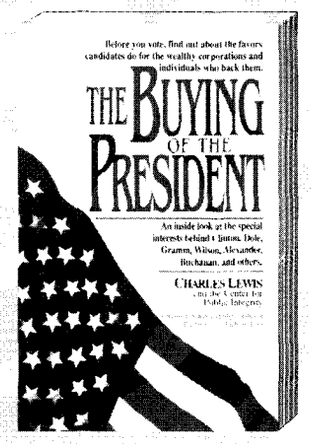
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insists on a certain fable-like, educative motion. His plays are not like this: they are more capacious than his stories, and as a result are perhaps finer-grained, but also less interesting. He said that of all his stories his favorite was "The Student," a four-page Tolstoyan parable about a student who discovers through a kind of revelation, on a cold Good Friday evening, the living truth of the Gospel story.

Chekhov does not visit "improving judgments" on his characters, but he judges many of them, and he longs for their improvement—the improvement of change. Almost all of Chekhov's characters are trapped—in their families, in their villages, in their marriages, in themselves—and long for escape. In his stories, Chekhov administers the jolt that forces them to see, as Tolstoy's Levin and Pierre are forced to see, that they are living false lives and must grasp truth. (In the plays, this jolt is more gradual, more climatic.) Certainly, Chekhov is not religious like Tolstoy, and it is one of the loveliest things about his work that in it the true life is no more precise than a distant warmth, and that his characters change their self-allegiance for mysterious reasons. Tolstoy is a great metaphysical bear in this respect, always foraging among his characters' treasure: "Levin's thoughts were busy with the one and only subject, outside his farming, that interested him at this time ... 'What am I? Where am I? And why am I here?' " This is Tolstoy in all his fine fierceness and literalness. Yet Chekhov, who revered Tolstoy above all writers, clearly learned from his anxious dogmatism. Chekhov can be as coercive as Tolstoy, formally at least. After all, his characters change their sense of themselves in only two or three pages of narrative. He leads his characters to the well and makes them drink fresh water. Then, unlike Tolstoy, he gently abandons the story, returning it to negligent life.

Yet when these stories have expired—"The Duel" ends with the words: "It began to spot with rain"—we often hear the same thing. We hear Laevsky, who is trapped in his relationship with his mistress, crying to himself, "Run away! Run away!" Or the young teacher in "The Russian Master," who woos a local girl, only to find—within two pages of the story!—that he is dreaming of his old freedom as a student, and imagining other lives: "He wanted to toil in some factory or big workshop, to lecture to audiences, to write, to publish, to make a splash, to exhaust himself, to suffer." In "Rothschild's Fiddle," which is almost a fairy tale, a coffin-maker realizes after his wife's death that his entire life has been a waste, and that not once in fifty-two years of marriage has he ever shown his wife any affection. He decides to reform by behaving decently toward Rothschild, a Jewish fiddler whom he has always bullied. "You only live once," he thinks to himself, "so why don't you get anything out of it?" Most famously, in "The Lady With The Dog," an adulterous couple realize that their marriages have been false, that their new relationship is the true life and that they are caught in a "nonsensical existence, and it was impossible to escape from it." These self-renunciations are emphatic, swift, bare-fisted.

Like many others', Sontag's praise passes over Chekhov's comedy, without which he hardly exists as a writer. It is this that separates him from Tolstoy. All his greatness flows from his comedy, and in particular his cold eye and his absolving heart. He insisted on calling his plays comedies, to the incomprehension of some of their actors and directors, and Richard Gilman is wrong to separate what he calls the "darker plays" from the "comedies" of *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*. For we feel the presence of comedy in everything that Chekhov wrote. His sense of humor is very strange and sharp. Consider this characteristic sentence from his *Notebooks*: "The dog walked in the street and was ashamed of its crooked legs." This is both unsentimental and whimsical; cold-eyed and protective. It is grotesque to notice such a deformity (or grotesque to register it as a deformity); but to feel a dog's shame is also, as it were, grotesquely generous.

In the ten reminiscences that fill the first half of Andrei Turkov's wonderful book (it was first published in Moscow in 1990), Chekhov's friends draw a portrait of the writer which is dominated by his sense of comedy. He had the comic's tendency to make unexpected things seem inevitable or natural. An actor once asked him to explain the kind of writer Trigorin is, in *The Seagull*. "But he wears checkered trousers," he replied. Gentle and modest, he disliked being the center of attention, and he did not enjoy long arguments or discussions. He had a horror of being on stage and would contrive to leave the theater before the curtain call. He delivered judgments softly, but as if they were too obvious to say. "But listen," he told Stanislavsky, "Ibsen is no playwright! ... Ibsen just doesn't know life. In life it simply isn't like that." He would sit at the edges of company, slyly bestowing his reticence, and then deliver a comic shaft, something rapid and glancing and irrelevant, and with the tone of sunny challenge that surrealism has.

It is clear that Chekhov used his humor as a form of evasion. One friend writes that Chekhov "lacked gaiety, and his fine, intelligent eyes always looked at everything 'from a distance.' " He had an arbitrary smile, which would flicker at apparently odd moments, and a calm independence. His sense of humor, like everything about him, was oddly unaccountable. It existed in its own ledger of one, and could not be made to add up to any kind of solution. Chekhov was beloved but unknowable.

He was born in Taganrog, in southern Russia, in 1860. His father, a poor grocer, was the son of a serf who had purchased his freedom. Pretty quickly Chekhov became the head, and the savior, of his family. While studying medicine at Moscow University, he began writing comic sketches, squibs, vaudevilles and playlets for newspapers, to help move his family out of their miserable one-room apartment. His two elder brothers, one struggling at writing, the other at painting, were no help. There is something sourceless about Chekhov: his confidence, his maturity, his formidable sobriety, even his talent as a writer, seem to have had no obvious nurture. His loyalty to his family was one of the few things about which he allowed himself any pride. The novelist Ivan Bunin reports that Chekhov uncharacteristically boasted to several people that he "never broke the fourth commandment."

Chekhov's angry lecture to his brother Nikolai is one of the few examples from a man generally incapable of lecturing. At the age of 26 he wrote to Nikolai, chiding him for his drinking and his bohemianism. In his letter, reproduced in Turkov's book, he offered eight rules by which "well-bred people" should live. They do not sleep in their clothes or get drunk. They restrain their sexual impulses, they do not brag: "The truly gifted are always in the shadows, in the crowd, far from exhibitions." Nikolai, he implied, had broken all eight. Nikolai complained of being "misunderstood." His younger brother showed his steel: "You are understood quite well. If you do not understand yourself, it is not the fault of others."

Chekhov wrote hack's trivia for six years. Most critics overlook this work. But even his long stories have a rapidity which pitches them between cartoon and fairy tale. In his mature work his comedy would remain a quiet kind of slapstick. At the end of his life, he still

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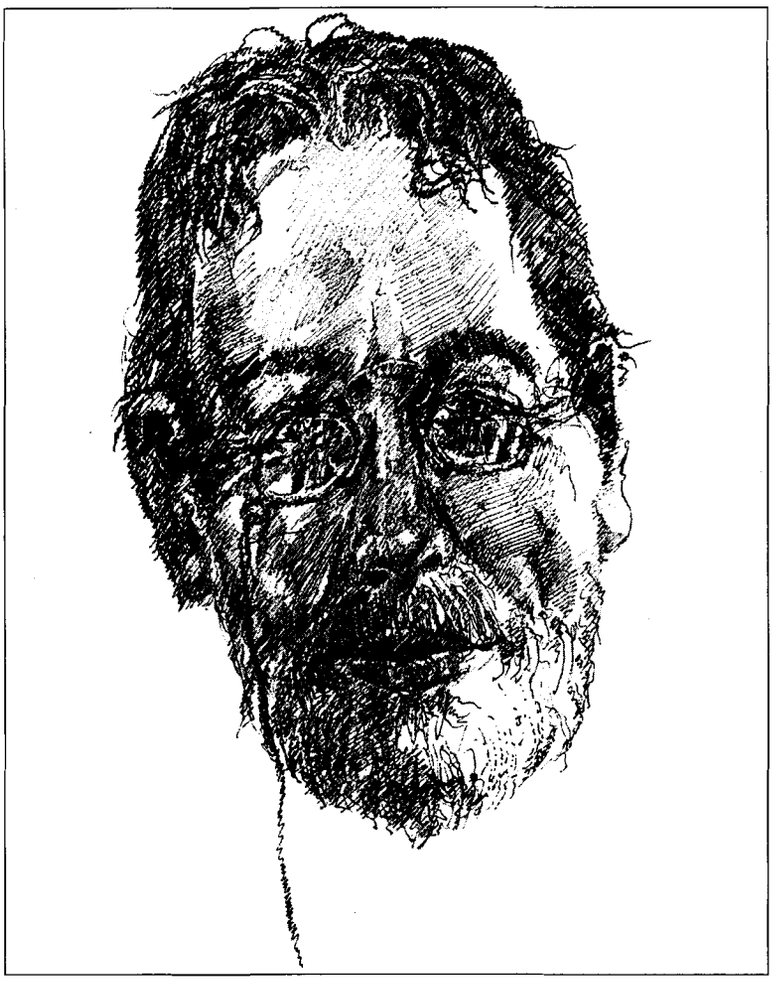
enjoyed absurd squibs. Bunin recalled dragging through newspapers for silly stories, and Chekhov finding this Chekhovian tale: "'Babkin, a Samara merchant,' he replied in a reedy voice, laughing, 'left all his money for a memorial to Hegel.'" Tatiana Shchepkina-Kupernik remembered seeking shelter from the rain in a barn. Chekhov joked that he should write a vaudeville: "Two people waiting for the rain to pass in an empty barn, joking, laughing, drying their umbrellas, professing their love for each other; and then the rain stops, the sun comes out—and he suddenly dies of a heart attack!" To the objection that this did not sound much like a vaudeville, Chekhov replied: "But very true to life.... Here we are, joking, laughing, and suddenly—bang! The end!"

Most of Chekhov's stories have this kind of formal slap. They seem to drift at their characters' whims, and yet they bustle along. Even in stories that are not comic, his characters move at the speed of comedy, which is to say, at the speed of light, in sunbursts of illumination. In "The Kiss," some tipsy soldiers are leaving a party, running through the grounds of the mansion they have just left. At first they are silent. Chekhov displays his capacity to speak wide, ordinary truths: they were "probably thinking ... would they ever see the day when they would own a large house, have a family, a garden...." And then, a line later: "As they went through the garden gate they all started talking at once and, for no apparent reason, laughed out loud."

The Russian soul darts out of a cloud, and then disappears again. It is, in fact, the rapidity of inconsequence—and inconsequence is always tinged with comedy, because it is apparently nonsensical: "for no apparent reason." In "The Bishop," Chekhov has an entire congregation, gathered for Mass, start weeping. And then comes the fable-like briskness: "But about five minutes later the nuns were singing, the weeping had stopped and everything was normal again."

Chekhov's sense of humor, and his simplicity, is childlike. He said that his favorite description of the sea was to be found in a schoolboy's notebook: "The sea was very large." Bunin wrote that in his house at Yalta his bedroom was as neat and bare as the bedroom of a young girl. In Rome, he witnessed a lavish religious procession at St. Peter's. His companion M.M. Kovalevsky murmured that for the writer such things had their attractions. Not at all, replied Chekhov. "The modern novelist would be obliged to satisfy himself with the phrase: 'A silly procession dragged on.'" Chekhov favors the naïve, still-unconquered complexities of the child. It is one of the ways he smarts his world into novelty. It is often seen as a child might see it—so that crows' nests in trees "look like huge fur caps"; or a woman is seen with an enormous chin "so out of proportion to the rest of her face it looked as if she had a large stone in her mouth"; or a man is seen with "little waxed moustaches which make his plump smooth face look like a toy." Gorky noticed that in Chekhov's presence people were calmed, or challenged, into behaving in a simpler, more honest fashion.



ANTON CHEKHOV BY DAVID SCHORR FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Chekhov grew up in a small, southern town far from things, and his humor has a kind of farcical, debunking villager's wisdom about it. Think of Pishchik, in *The Cherry Orchard*, who has never read Nietzsche but refers to the philosopher as if he were a neighbor: "tremendous fellow, very famous, colossally clever chap—says in his works that there's nothing wrong with forging banknotes." At the beginning of his story "In The Ravine," Chekhov introduces us to a village that is famous to everyone around for being the place where "the deacon ate all the caviar at someone's funeral." Like the shrewd villager who sitting at his door sees everything, Chekhov's comedy is pitiless because it sees through calculation. For Chekhov, we are not to be trusted; at any moment, the butterfly might mutate. His characters hibernate in their solitary winters of ambition and strategy. When they emerge, they are many-headed. A woman cries not just because she is unhappy, but also because she knows she is beautiful in tears; an ambitious husband in a provincial town makes his wife bow to strangers at the opera, because they are local dignitaries: "She's the wife of the manager of the local revenue office," he says, over his wife's objections.

But all this would make Chekhov only a great satirist. His comedy also forgives immensely, since it sees accident as well as calculation. One of the greatest stories Chekhov ever wrote, "Gusev," is about the accident of death. It was prompted by his return voyage, in 1890, from the island of Sakhalin. While at sea, two men died and were thrown overboard. The story is set in a ship's sick ward. Gusev is dying. He is lowly and unintelligent—he believes that the winds are chained up somewhere, like dogs, to a wall at the end of the world, and that it is stormy because the dogs have broken loose. He is teased. Everyone but Gusev knows that he will never reach Russia. Here we witness Chekhov's brutality, something akin to cruelty. For the sailors do not just tease Gusev; they tell

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him that he is not long for the world. When he staggers up onto deck for a breath of air, he bumps into a tethered horse, standing on its own. He strokes the horse, which might be a moment of final pathos for most writers. But not for Chekhov, who always swerves from sentimentality: the horse bites Gusev. Meanwhile, downstairs, one of the other sailors dies. He puts down the hand of cards he has been dealing, and "with a frightened, foolish smile looked round at all of them. 'I shan't be a minute, mates, I'll . . . ' he said, and lay down on the floor."

That adjective "foolish"! Chekhov sees that we are foolish in death, and he is stony-hearted enough to say it. In saying it, however, he dignifies us, sweeps us into our eternal blamelessness, foolish in death and clumsy at birth. And no one is more foolish than Gusev, who dies on board and is wrapped in sailcloth. "Sewn up in the sailcloth," notices Chekhov, "he looked like a carrot or radish: broad at the head and narrow at the feet." Gusev is dispatched. Above the sea, clouds are massing. One, writes Chekhov, has the shape of a triumphal arch, another looks like a lion, a third like a pair of scissors. We realize that if Gusev is foolish, then so is Chekhov, and so is this story: For why is it sillier to think of the wind as a chained dog, as Gusev does, than to think of a cloud as a pair of scissors or a corpse as a radish, as Chekhov does? The story is supremely on Gusev's side, and gently releases him from the prison of his days into the fantastic. It moves from cruelty to the gravest mercy.

In 1885, Chekhov was introduced to Alexei Suvorin, the wealthy owner of the conservative newspaper *Novoye Vremya.* Suvorin had been watching the writer's progress, and wanted to publish his stories in his newspaper. He would become, effectively, Chekhov's patron, forwarding him money for his expedition to Sakhalin, and for the trip to the south of France in 1897 which he took under doctors' advice. Suvorin would also help with some of Chekhov's rural philanthropy, such as the hospital and alcoholics' clinic at Melikhovo. Chekhov's letters to Suvorin, which are rather scantily represented in the second half of Turkov's book, form the bulk of his published correspondence in translation. Suvorin was a conservative, and Chekhov was a liberal; their friendship almost dissolved over the Dreyfus affair. (Chekhov told Suvorin that Dreyfus was probably innocent, that the trial had been whipped up by anti-Semitic and nationalist hysteria.) Suvorin knew that Chekhov was a great writer, but he wanted Chekhov to use his fiction to take stances and assume political or moral positions. He was a useful anvil against which Chekhov shaped himself.

Suvorin's patronage marks the beginning of Chekhov's maturity. The long story, "The Steppe," published in 1888, is often taken as its first bloom. Its author was 28, and this was his first story to be published in an important monthly literary journal. But a beautiful and absolutely characteristic story, "The Kiss," appeared in 1887. An army brigade is billeted in a town. Its officers are invited to a ball at the local nobleman's house. One of the soldiers, Ryabovich, is less experienced in love than his colleagues. He is shy, and he envies the confidence with which the other men flirt with the women at the party. Then something extraordinary happens. He goes for a walk, gets lost in the huge house and finds himself in an unlit room. Out of nowhere, a woman appears, whispers "At last!", and kisses him. She recoils instantly: she has been waiting for someone, and Ryabovich is not that man. But this mistake fills Ryabovich with joy. He hoards his secret like food. For days he is dreamy and radiant. When, one evening, he finally draws the courage to tell the other soldiers of his experience, he suffers great disappointment, because he realizes that what is remarkable to him is ordinary or improbable to his friends. "In that one minute he had told them everything and he was astonished when he considered how little time was needed to tell his story: he had imagined it would take until morning."

He had imagined it would take until morning. This is a gorgeous moment. But it is also a gorgeous self-description. Chekhov's own stories are like Ryabovich's. They take only a few pages but imagine themselves as bottomless. They last a minute and believe that they might take until morning. They move at the speed of comedy, but at the pace of fantasy—at the pace of their characters' fantasies, which are infinite and laxly calendared. This was Chekhov's great innovation as a story-writer—to slow down narrative to catch the milky swirl, the shady half-life of fantasy, the drift and bashful vanity of our imaginative lives, and to realize that these inner lives exist in their own gentle almanac, in their own time. Yet the form of the stories insists on speed, on hustling Ryabovich through his minute. So these two speeds go on in the stories, the formal and the fantasy, the Julian calendar, as it were, bumping against the Gregorian.

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Nabokov once said that, although he could not exactly say why, Chekhov would be the one writer he would take with him on a trip to another planet. But he lamented Chekhov's "medley of dreadful prosaisms, ready-made epithets, repetitions. . . ." Nabokov is unfair. Chekhov serves his people's dreaminess as few writers do. This is why his details, lusters, metaphors and nature descriptions are more interesting than Tolstoy's (Tolstoy was not very good at this kind of writing) or Gogol's, or even Nabokov's; his descriptions are always human fantasies. He sees and hears nature not as a writer, but as one of his characters might. "From somewhere far off came the mournful, indistinct cry of a bittern, sounding just like a cow locked up in a shed. . . ."; "A cuckoo seemed to be adding up someone's age, kept losing count and starting again." An old woman gripping a child's neck with "fingers as hard and dry as stale rolls." A girl about to burst into tears, "her face oddly strained as if her mouth were full of water." And my favorite: the noise, in a poor peasant village, of "an expensive-sounding accordion." These moments are poetic, and yet there is something practical or domestic about them, because they do not leave his characters' heads.

In 1886, a year before he wrote "The Kiss," Chekhov started spitting up blood. For a long time he dealt with his tuberculosis in the same evasive manner with which he deferred marriage: he invented mock-diagnoses and playful fantasies. His family and friends were alarmed when he told them, in 1890, that he wanted to travel through Siberia to the island of Sakhalin, which had been a penal colony since the 1860s. There was no trans-Siberian railroad, and it was a journey, there and back, of over 4,000 miles. In his letter begging Suvorin to advance him funds, Chekhov suggested a variety of reasons for his desire. He wished to study prison conditions; the reforms had done nothing for the sick and imprisoned, "thereby breaking the chief commandment of Christian civilization." He had become indolent, and half a year of "unceasing labor" would teach him discipline. It also seems likely that, more simply, the writer whose abiding theme is escape, sought flight. Suvorin relented.

Chekhov was busy on Sakhalin. He made a census of the population, filing over 10,000 census cards. His book on his expedition (published in 1895, and translated into English as *The Island: A Journey to Sakhalin*) has a reportorial pall over it. It describes, somewhat clinically, the horrifying conditions that the writer found there. Each chapter rests on a bed of footnotes, which reveal an astonishing amount of research and reading. There are tables and statistics. Of course, Chekhov's noticing eye was at work—the unsanitary cells, the man who had chopped off two of his fingers and had bandaged them in filthy cloth, the prisoners in solitary confinement chained by their feet to the wall. Near the end of the book, he watches a murderer being given ninety lashes for murdering a Cossack. There is a Chekhovian detail: a military medical assistant "who stands at the door, says in a wheedling voice as though asking a favor: 'Your worship, please let me see how they punish a prisoner.' " There were times, he wrote, "when I felt that I saw before me the extreme limits of man's degradation, lower than which he cannot go."

Sakhalin seems to have changed Chekhov's life. He had been beaten by his father as a child, and now he struggled to rid himself of his memories of the Sakhalin floggings. He believed in the importance of good schools and medical services, and the return of the land to the peasants as their private property; and in this he shares a certain amount with the radical Dr. Astrov in *Uncle Vanya*. But Sakhalin heated his

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meliorism. After 1892, when he had moved his parents and sister to the country, at Melikhovo, he became more involved in providing free medicine for the local area. He became a hospital inspector, helped to build a new school in 1895, and in 1897 was one of the officials for the national census.

His stories became bleaker: "Gusev" (1890); "Ward 6" (1892); "Peasants" (1897), which offered such a devastating account of life in a poor village that even the censor was silenced; "In The Ravine" (1900). His characters long for escape, but their entrapment is intense. Even in the love story "The Lady With The Dog" (1899), the lovers feel trapped in a cage, "and it was impossible to escape from it, just as though you were in a lunatic asylum or a convict chain-gang!" "Ward 6" is set, indeed, in a lunatic asylum: a doctor who, out of moral lethargy and a misguided belief in stoicism, has ignored the suffering of his insane patients, suddenly finds that his mind is lapsing. He is himself thrown into the asylum by an ambitious new colleague. From the ward window, he sees the prison nearby: "'There's reality for you!' thought Dr. Ragin, and he felt terrified." At the end, he dies of a stroke. His last vision is one of Chekhov's most beautiful mirages: "A herd of deer, extraordinarily beautiful and graceful, which he had been reading about on the previous day, raced past him; then a peasant woman stretched out a hand to him with a registered letter...."

After Sakhalin, the absolution of the entrapped and punished seemed to become almost obsessive for Chekhov: poor Gusev is released, and "Ward 6" forces Dr. Ragin toward the realization that his patients, "who looked like dark shadows in the moonlight, must have experienced the same kind of pain day after day for years." "Peasants" closes by asking us to remember that its protagonists "were still human beings, suffering and weeping like other people and there was nothing in their lives which did not provide some excuse...." Chekhov wrote to Suvorin in 1898 that the writer's business was "to stand up for the guilty if they have already been condemned and punished." These were the fruits of Sakhalin.

Yet the last few years of Chekhov's life were also the years in which he wrote most gorgeously about love—in the plays *Uncle Vanya* (1899) and *Three Sisters* (1901), and in his story "The Lady With The Dog." "Was there in his life at least one great love? I think not," wrote Bunin. Certainly, Chekhov had kept marriage at bay, even to the extent of treating cruelly a young friend of his sister's who was in love with him. But Chekhov, to judge from his letters, did fall in love with the woman he married in 1901, Olga Knipper. Some of Chekhov's friends thought it a sad marriage, and perhaps Bunin thought it one of convenience, a nurse for the now-sick writer. Knipper, who was an actress in Stanislavsky's Moscow Arts Theater (Chekhov had first seen her as Irina in their production of *The Seagull*), stayed in Moscow during the winters, while Chekhov was forced, for reasons of health, to stay in Yalta, the Crimean resort. He was now depleted in body and spirit, and pined for her. Yet it seems that even in this final blossoming Chekhov did not want a simple bouquet. He had written years before that he would marry on his terms: his wife in Moscow and he in the country. "I promise to be a marvelous husband, only give me a wife who, like the moon, does not appear in my sky every day."

Still, he made use of this sense of love as intermittent, snatched and circumscribed in "The Lady With The Dog." It is set in Yalta. A couple begin an adulterous affair. Unexpectedly, they fall deeply in love. Both return to their families. In Moscow, the man, Gurov, tries to tell a friend at the club. It is Chekhovian comedy: the two men pass each other by like bent javelins. As the friend is leaving the club, he turns to Gurov, who may assume that this is the moment of male communication. "You were quite right," muses the friend, "the sturgeon *was* a bit off." The lovers meet regularly in Moscow, and both feel that this secret life is the true one, and that their public lives are false. With unforced loveliness, Chekhov has Gurov hint at this idea of two existences, one public and one secret, to his little daughter as he is taking her to school one snowy morning. Gurov explains that even though it is three degrees above zero, it is snowing. "But then, you see, it's only warm on the earth's surface; in the upper layers of the atmosphere the temperature's quite different."

There is life on the earth; and there is another kind of life, which is hidden. The doctor who did not believe in immortality flattered the invisible. The writer who is famous for his accommodation of the ordinary felt the eccentricity of the unknown. He refuses to bruise what is unpicked by plucking it into visibility. Chekhov is a comic poet. Unlike Tolstoy, he litters his way with images; Tolstoy must pick up this litter, must clean the way. And so there is something of the mystic—of all things!—about this practical comedian. Often we see that his characters long to escape into a freedom whose vastness depends on its nonexistence. Moscow is not merely an impossibility for the three sisters: it does not exist, and their desire for it has made it disappear.

In his last plays, and in particular *Uncle Vanya* and *Three Sisters*, Chekhov opens his characters to this aperture of disappearance. Both plays conjure the idea that the new life we desire may be in the future, a hundred or two

Tornado

Through the open windows the shadow of my mother is moving
with the light that is removing itself from the outside scenery.
The treeline is getting lost in the thickening darkness and the ladders
that we use for apple picking are leaning further and further away.

Somewhere my father is calling like faint thunder but I can't find him
and my sister is carrying our jar, its lid driven with air holes,
into the trees and into the dissolving valley behind our house.
My skirt is an apron of wind and the house is disappearing

and the dome of the sky is revolving and the stars are like light
seen through a colander or a sieve or a hundred button-holes or a torn jar lid.
In the fields the air is shaking with prairie grass and the corn
has grown taller than the second floor of our house.

I can see the edges of my sister a hundred feet before me as the wind
rises over us and the hail salts the earth in furrows and the trees
throw themselves on the overturned ground and the house buckles
and opens to the wind and the jar like a lantern swinging.

AMY SCATTERGOOD

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hundred years hence—a time that, explicitly, we will not experience. At the choric end of *Uncle Vanya*, Sonya predicts peace in immortality: "We shall find peace. We shall hear the angels, we shall see the sky sparkling with diamonds." It makes its audience uneasy, this ending, for it seems earnest and almost religious. But perhaps its strangeness has to do with one's suspicion that Chekhov's characters are longing not for salvation but for negation. They are acting on Chebutykin's anguish in *Three Sisters*: "Oh, how nice not to exist." Sonya's devout vision may be a vision of the grave. Perhaps the gap between longing for a new life and longing for no life is small. To desire something too much is to obliterate it, to send it into the air; but one may also desire obliteration itself.

"I see a light glimmering in the distance, I have a vision of freedom." Chekhov's freedom is a freedom of the air, and in his writing he often uses the stars or the light or the slow retirement of a sunset as an emblem of the freedom that his people crave—an upper atmosphere of the soul, where "the temperature's quite different." Russian art, from some of the early icons to Chagall's crooked streets and flying apparitions, makes the metaphor of flight literal, and it is a flight to nowhere, or to nowhere but the imagination. Chekhov is faithful to this. At the famous end of *Dead Souls*, Gogol imagines Russia as a troika moving through the air. "Russia, where are you flying to? Answer! She gives no answer." Saltykov-Shchedrin's Porphiry, in his great novel *The Golovlyov Family*, fantasizes himself into the air: "With all this fantasizing, he had reached a state of complete intoxication without even being aware of it. He no longer felt the ground under his feet and was convinced he had sprouted wings." Chekhov, too. His Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, in "The Duel," must escape. But how? "Free from her clothes Nadyezhda Fyodorovna felt a desire to fly. And it seemed to her that if she were to wave her hands she would fly upwards."

This is not modest, nor minor, though it is modern. Chekhov is *not* prosaic. He is poetic and inflamed. He advised that in his final denunciation of provincial village life, in *Three Sisters*, Andrew should be "ready to square up to the audience with his fists." Chekhov's brutality is not ordinary, not merely the sanctioned literary "truthfulness" for which he is cherished. It is something clumsier and more fantastic than truth. His characters are in flight from unlivable extravagances to impossible ones. They are not tactful Anglo-American angels. Hatched in solitude, their fantasies fly through the air toward their famished completion, whirring grotesquely, comically and beautifully. •

Alienated Labor

BY MICHAEL IGNATIEFF

A Requiem for Karl Marx by Frank E. Manuel

(Harvard University Press, 255 pp., $24.95)

Frank Manuel calls his wise and elegant study a requiem, but it is by no means clear that Marx is dead. We should attend any prospective funeral celebrations like dons at a Mafia funeral, approaching the undertaker's confection in the open coffin with a pin in our hand. Marx's demise has been much reported, but it may be one of those cunning strategems of history of which he believed he was the privileged seer. Marxism has lost political power in most of the countries and cultures in which it enjoyed political power, but its ideas and its methods are far from dead, certainly, in Western universities. Resistant pseudo-strains have been cross-bred with structuralism and post-structuralism: the resultant "readings" of everything in the world may be obscure, but they are studied and imitated. Intellectual fashions being as callow as they are, and institutional memories being as short, there is no reason not to think that some subsequent generation of students will not find themselves struggling through the *Grundrisse* and other light classics of the tradition exactly like the generations that preceded them.

Even beyond the airless confines of the academy, there is much to give cheer to the man Engels called The Old

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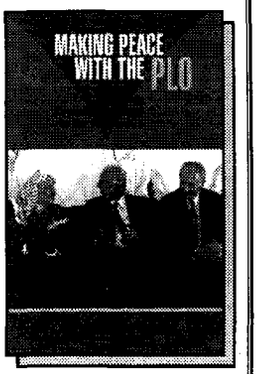

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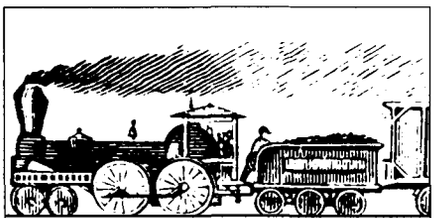

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Moor. The Communist Party of China continues to keep a quarter of the world's population under its unforgiving thrall; the dictatorship of the party is proving compatible with free markets (or freer markets) after all. In Europe, Communist cadres are returning to power in the Baltics, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine and Russia itself. They may not profess Marxist tenets, but the Marxists were the ones, remember, who recommended that we see beyond the epiphenomena to the real motives, that we study not what people profess but what they do.

The new leaders of Eastern Europe purport to be post-Communist and post-Marxist, but their success depends critically on their Communist past: they alone have experience of the state apparatus and mastery of the Leninist arts of conspiracy and cabal. They have turned themselves into authoritarian populists of the nationalist persuasion or peddlers of nostalgia for the vanished era of Brezhnevite stability. They preside over market economies and civil societies so deformed by state tutelage that any sizable contract must pass through their hands. These Communist-trained elites dominate their economies as they did in Communist days, while skimming whatever capitalist cream comes to the surface of their churn. Serbia's Milosevic is perhaps the supreme practitioner of this new form of primitive accumulation, but his system is only one among many. There is emerging in Eastern Europe, and in Asian and Caucasian Russia, in various forms, a durable hybrid of Communist-style authoritarianism in politics and market economics at its most corrupt and rapacious. The worst of both worlds.

Frank Manuel is aware of Marx's ghoulish return from the grave. He is too fine a historian to suppose that a discredited doctrine exhausts its capacity to generate consequences. Future generations will invent the Marx they need, just as the generation of the '60s invented the humanist Marx that it needed by dint of much ingenious interpretation of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. For such afterlives to be possible, there must be some grain of plausibility in the original texts. In Marx's early manuscripts, there was the philosophical anthropology of man as a "species being," uniquely conscious of his human identity and therefore aware of the unnaturalness of his class-divided bourgeois existence. Such a lofty, almost sentimental idea will not die soon or easily; it is so vast and so vague that it can support almost any imaginable content.

From *A Requiem for Karl Marx*

KARL MARX AS PROMETHEUS, FLYSHEET ON THE BANNING OF THE *RHEINISCHE ZEITUNG*, 1843

Manuel's book, part biography, part reflection on Marx's reputation and academic afterlife, is an excellent place to begin thinking about his largely nefarious impact. It is based on extended research into the Marx-Engels correspondence, and of course on Manuel's decades of study of the intellectual and political history of the West since the Enlightenment, its utopian traditions especially. The book is a calm yet scathing reckoning, dispassionate yet trenchant. The soul of the world's most famous materialist is not laid to rest, it is laid bare; and the result has the reader both admiring and recoiling.

If Marx will enjoy another afterlife, it will not be his particular doctrines themselves, but his larger intellectual project, his incredible ambition, which will provide the inspiration. What is so striking about the post-Marxist intellectual situation is the general theoretical silence about causation in history, the conceptual timidity, the refusal to even engage with the question of what general causes—demographic, technological, economic—determine the broad trends of our future. Analysis has been replaced by futurology, as in Alvin Toffler, or by academicism, as in Immanuel Wallerstein. At the very least, Marx was not shy of ultimate formulations. His theory was grand.

This grandeur, indeed, was his *raison d'être*. He sought to ground revolutionary politics in a "science" of the future: we may reject his notion of revolution, we may mock his notion of science, but we can still admire the attempt to explain how power, knowledge, technology and society collide to make the future. Nowadays, as every discipline retreats into the contemplation of its particulars and all engage in the foreswearing of synoptic ambition, as philosophy gives way to irony, the Marxian project seems more tonic and even more difficult to contemplate. It is important to see that the human longing for the big picture will not disappear. Marx remains alive because the project which he initiated—the understanding of the capitalist system as a system—remains a necessity; and Milton Friedman all by himself will not do the trick.

What drove Marx to his particular project? The psychology of abstraction—why some people excel at theory, why others excel at the depiction of particulars—is an undeveloped science. Manuel suspects that Marx's penchant for abstraction was driven by a profoundly antagonistic nature. He was the kind of figure who could only love

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individuals as abstractions; he praised the historical role of the proletariat while recoiling from contact with actual proletarians; he revered the revolutionary vocation and loathed most actual revolutionaries; he preferred the comfortingly controllable realm of his own theories to unruly reality. Yet this escapism is common enough. Most bookish people cannot stand too much reality. The question is why this particular bookish person managed to bring together Hegelian dialectic and Scottish political economy with such devastating results. Manuel's answer is that Marx was consumed by rage, and this rage drove him to create an intellectual synthesis as a battering ram against the bourgeoisie.

As a study in the psychology of loathing, Manuel's biography is truly first-rate. Marx despised most everyone: his mother, Jews, black and Asiatic peoples, Poles and other lesser Europeans, most fellow revolutionaries, all bourgeois politicians, as well as the bailiffs and the bill-collectors who tormented his penurious exile. The correspondence with Engels drips with scorn for "niggers," "Juden" and the "Dreck and Scheisse" of the Socialist International. The German socialist leader Ferdinand Lassalle earned the ultimate compliment: "Jewish nigger."

His anti-Semitism was deep and unrelenting. Polish Jews, he remarked to Engels, multiplied like lice. Throughout his private correspondence, Jews were monotonously associated with dirt, pollution and squalid money-making. Toward his mother, a Dutch rabbi's daughter of simple character, he displayed a lifelong coldness and disdain. Toward his father, a mild-mannered civil servant who had converted to Lutheranism, he mixed grudging affection with condescension. Manuel concludes that most of Marx's loathing was an expression of self-loathing. Yet "his denied origins gnawed at his guts on some level of consciousness throughout his life." Marx's carbuncles—the skin inflammations which tormented him at moments of crisis throughout his life—may have been the outer sign of inner writhing.

Manuel maintains that Marx's self-hatred "when turned outward was transformed into a universal rage against the existing order of society, and bred a utopian fantasy of redemption." The revolutionary fantasy of a golden age, in which there would be neither Christian nor Jew, neither proletarian nor capitalist, recapitulated the Jewish prophetic tradition of a chiliastic rebirth of the chosen people. Certainly his theories displayed an unrelenting emphasis on human universality, at the expense of particularity, be it Jewishness, ethnicity, religion or nationality. "On the Jewish Question," the brutally revealing essay of 1843, makes it clear that Marx believed particular Jewish salvation could be achieved only as part of a general proletarian revolution, in which Judaism would be destroyed. Marx was not so much blind to the claim of the particular, be it religious, ethnic or national, as he was dogmatically convinced that particular forms of salvation—national self-determination, for example—would delay or defer the universal day of reckoning.

The interesting question is how much this doctrinaire universalism can be taken as a rejection of his own particular Jewishness. Manuel derives most of Marx's philosophy from his biography, in particular his Jewish self-hatred: "The repression of the plain fact of his Jewish origins and the dislike, even the overt hatred of his mother, were interwoven and became a destructive force that underlay Marx's relations with most human beings he encountered." Manuel's account is never crude or reductive—and yet I wonder whether he does not exaggerate the influence of the life, or one aspect of it, on the work. It is a little hard to accept Manuel's view that Jewish self-hatred colored everything that Marx ever wrote. It is also having it both ways to claim that he disavowed his Jewishness and remained captive of its messianic dreams. It is possible to conclude from the evidence that Marx was simply the assimilated son of a convert who had put Jewishness far behind him; that the modern Jewish drama did not always loom as large for him as it does for some of the commentators on him. Self-hatred, certainly, is not a simple thing, and neither is assimilation. One cannot assume, as Manuel sometimes appears to do, when he speaks of Jewishness as "indelible," that assimilation always precedes or follows from self-loathing. It is true that some people assimilate so as to surrender to inner or outer pressures; but some people assimilate as a matter of free choice, because Jewishness (or some other ethnic or religious identity) really has become vestigial to them, really has been replaced by another commitment.

Marx's father does not appear to have suffered from self-loathing. His conversion was an act of prudence, undertaken without passion or a feeling of conversion; and it does not seem to have left many marks on an otherwise mild, secular and inoffensive creature. His son was infinitely more tempestuous, but it is not plausible that the entirety of his temperament had its origins in this single fact of a disavowed Jewishness. The relation between anti-Semitism and self-loathing might also be more complicated than Manuel believes. Does Marx's offensive use of the word "Jew" necessarily mean that he despised himself as one? How primary, not for us but for him, was his Jewish identity? Was it really more powerful than his identity as a revolutionary? It is true that Marx was often assailed by doubt and depression, but it is not obvious that this reflected a specifically Jewish self-denigration.

Manuel's biography is extremely powerful in explaining how much of Marx's analytical enterprise was driven by hatred. It is less successful in explaining why his hatreds took their particular form—why hatred drove him to produce an intellectual anatomy of the capitalist system. The materials—the Hegelian theory of history, Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, the Parliamentary Blue Books—were all waiting to be combined in a new science of society. Only Marx achieved this prodigious synthesis. Manuel's book leaves us with a sense of wonder at the achievement and at its great cost; and this sense of wonder at the most familiar figure in the history of modern thought is a testament to the freshness, the candor and the intellectual tautness of this book.

MICHAEL IGNATIEFF is writing a biography of Isaiah Berlin.

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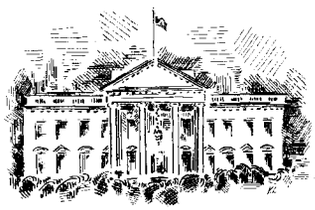
Hillary's vacuum

REMEMBER HILLARY RODHAM CLINton's youthful articles about children's rights? Unfairly caricatured by conservatives during the 1992 campaign, they argued that courts should adopt a (rebuttable) presumption that children are legally competent to identify their own best interests in major decisions about education, abortion and foster care. Although other First Ladies had done serious writing before reaching the White House—Lou Hoover and her husband, Herbert, for example, had translated a sixteenth-century Latin metallurgy treatise—Mrs. Clinton's argument that children should be presumed to be autonomous rights bearers, rather than helpless wards of the state, earned special praise for its intellectual ambition. In an eloquent defense of her work in *The New York Review of Books* Garry Wills called her "one of the more important scholar-activists of the last two decades."

NOW COMES MRS. CLINTON'S FIRST book, *It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (Simon & Schuster), which she claims to have written in her own hand. It is largely a collection of sentimental anecdotes and good housekeeping nostrums designed to support the thesis that children are helpless wards of the state (rather than autonomous rights bearers) who depend on the sympathy of "all of us" to survive the assaults of unidentified enemies. In every respect a book of virtues, it reveals Mrs. Clinton to be a William Bennett-style social conservative: she quotes Bennett on the evils of divorce and John Silber on the evils of TV violence. On the other hand, she supports heavy breathing, as in, "Adults should practice ... taking a deep breath before contributing to the climate of incivility and insecurity that surrounds us," and, "I wish we would all take a deep breath and remember that sex has been around for a long, long time." When Mrs. Clinton descends into specifics, however, she repudiates her former views. Her most important scholarly contribution, in a 1979 article, had been to question the paternalism of existing legal standards, which gave judges Solomonic discretion to identify the "best interests of the child" without examining the specific capacities and wishes of individual children. And yet in a chapter of her new book called "Every Child Needs a Champion," Mrs. Clinton confesses that "I often wished I could call in King Solomon to arbitrate" child custody cases; and she laments that judges don't identify the most appropriate caretaker by threatening to cut the helpless infants in half. So much for consulting the autonomous child.

THE FACT IS THAT, IN THE TWENTY years since Mrs. Clinton wrote her last article, the field of family law has experienced a creative ferment; dizzying changes in reproductive technology and social norms have generated all sorts of agonizing questions about whether children should be considered the property of those who provide the egg, the sperm, the womb or the cradle. It's hard to imagine a more fertile field for a policymaker who hopes to use the power of the state to protect children, since judges in domestic cases have sweeping discretion to regulate the personal lives and sexual choices of those to whom they award custody. In response to these anxious social changes, Republicans have recently proposed a "parental rights amendment" declaring, "the right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed." But Mrs. Clinton has nothing to say about these critical debates, because she is no longer interested in examining actual disputes between individual parents and individual children. Instead, her focus has shifted from the nuclear family to the "national community." She supports a surprisingly modest grab bag of federally subsidized social programs, including day care, midnight basketball and school uniforms. She worries that "many of us no longer feel free to ask a neighbor to lend a hand or an ear."



IN HER CHAPTER ON HEALTH care, "An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Intensive Care," she declines to discuss her work on the health care task force, but instead singles out the federal "Vaccines for Children" Act of 1993 as a major domestic policy achievement that is under "grave threat from budget cuts." In fact, the "Vaccines for Children" Act is a good emblem for what is frustrating about the Clintons' domestic policy. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan recently confessed on the Senate floor, he was "baffled" when the new administration, instead of expending its limited political capital on meaningful welfare reform, demanded more than $1 billion for a new federal immunization program in 1992. Free vaccinations were already available in state-funded public clinics, and the tiny percentage of unvaccinated children had more to do with negligent parents than with the cost or supply of the vaccines. Moreover, the program proved to be a bureaucratic nightmare as tens of thousands of vaccines sat unwanted in federal warehouses.

THE FAILURE OF THE "VACCINES for Children" Act points to a broader problem with *It Takes a Village*: the odd notion of the national "village" itself. In an interview with *Newsweek*, Mrs. Clinton worries that readers will see the village as a metaphor for the federal government; but in many cases, the village clearly *is* a metaphor for the federal government. "The village can do much to give parents the time they need to establish their children's well-being in the first weeks and months of life," she says, pointing to The Family and Medical Leave Act. But Mrs. Clinton wants to have it every which way: in other passages, she defines the village as "the network of values and relationships that support and affect our lives," which makes it sound like a national Renaissance weekend. The vacuousness of the concept culminates in Mrs. Clinton's reflections on Lee Atwater's question: Who will lead us out of this spiritual vacuum? "I cut out that passage and put it in a little book of sayings and Scriptures that I keep," Mrs. Clinton shyly confesses, "[a]nd I think the answer to his question ... must be all of us." The oxymoronic idea of a national community, composed of, and led by, "all of us" is an especially unhelpful abstraction in the context of family policy, which has traditionally been left to state and local judges and policymakers, rather than to the federal government. And by insisting that "there's no such thing as other people's children," Mrs. Clinton seem to strike a peppy balance between Immanuel Kant and Tracy Chapman.

WHY WOULD AN INTELLIGENT AND thoughtful lawyer like Hillary Rodham Clinton produce such a platitudinous book in the middle of the most important debate over social policy in the past fifty years? The president, of course, has the same tendency to reduce domestic issues to children's issues, and both Clintons seem to have reached a cool-eyed conclusion that the only way to defend even a limited federal role in social policy is to treat the voters like children. Alas, maybe they're right. But as Mrs. Clinton wrote in another era, "Children should have a right to be permitted to decide their own future if they are competent."

JEFFREY ROSEN

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Where We Stand

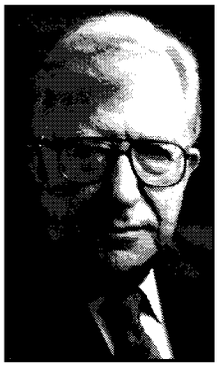
By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

Decentralization, Again

Americans are trying to fix their schools. There are many proposals for how to do this and movement in different directions, but one of the most popular directions now is decentralization. The theory is that school district bureaucracies are largely to blame for our education problems; they issue rules and regulations that, together with the rules in union contracts, hinder school reform.

Rules force all schools to be the same, the theory goes. They make flexibility difficult, if not impossible. In bureaucracies, employees are rewarded for complying with rules rather than for educating students. And rules, the theory continues, are made to make life easier for officials rather than to make schools more effective for students. Also, children are all different, as are their teachers, so if we're to have good schools, they will each have to be as different as our students and teachers.

Seems reasonable, doesn't it? A similar theory was advanced 25 years ago in the New York City school decentralization battle. It said, "Central officials don't care about students and don't really know what's going on in the system's 1,000 schools. And the central bureaucracy is not representative of the diverse groups in the city. If the system is broken up so that each community elects its own board, hires its own principals, chooses its own appropriate curriculum, and holds teachers accountable, we'll turn the schools and student achievement around. Parents will go all out in electing school boards—and we know that parental involvement improves student achievement. Parents will hold board members accountable through elections, just like in the suburbs. And if suburban communities can do a good job managing their schools, the communities in our city can, too. Besides, nothing can be worse than what we have now. And if it doesn't work, the legislature can change it again." That, too, sounded reasonable, and the New York State legislature created 32 school districts in New York City.



School decentralization theory, and the reform it prompted, turned out to be wrong.

What's the evidence after 25 years? Was the decentralization theory correct? For starters, student achievement has not soared as predicted. Also, the community boards have been frequently involved in scandals. Community board members have been caught selling jobs for money, drugs, and sex, and some have stolen funds. And there is little political accountability, since only about 10 percent of community members bother to vote in school board elections.

Last May 30th, we got a good, down-to-earth look at the condition of community school boards—and the decentralization theory in real life—from the *New York Daily News*. "Shocking Report on District School Boards," the headline read; "Exclusive Poll Every Parent Must Read." The *News* interviewed 236 of the 288 school board members and found that:

- 56 percent did not know the number of students in their district.
- 80 percent did not know the percentage of students in their district who could read at grade level.
- 78 percent did not know the percentage of students who were at grade level in math.
- 67 percent did not know the occupancy rate in their district schools, and 74 percent did not know how many schools in their district were over 100 percent occupied.
- 79 percent did not know the amount of their district budgets, even though they had voted on their budgets just a few weeks earlier.

The decentralization theory—and the reform it prompted—was wrong. Instead of knowledgeable and committed school boards, New York City got boards that the *News* called "Dumb and Dumber." Instead of better governance, the city got a system of mass patronage. And instead of a greater focus on student achievement, the city got schools that were almost actively encouraged to have less. Things couldn't get worse, they said 25 years ago, but they did. Now almost everyone wants a change, but since local school boards use their little patronage machines to support other politicians, that would be a heavy lift.

Does all this mean we should oppose recent proposals for even more decentralization? Like having each school on its own, apart from any central system? Like having parents, businesses or community groups run individual schools? Like creating more and more charter schools? Not necessarily. But we should be aware that things don't always work out the way our theories and hopes tell us—and that things *can* get worse.

Above all, we need to question and debate a hidden assumption behind these decentralization proposals: that changing the way schools are governed will change—that is, improve—teaching and student achievement. Only changes focused on teaching and student learning can do that. So far, we can confidently say that changing school governance will change things, but the assumption that it will be for the better is not proven.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1996 by Albert Shanker.

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THE BOMBAY SAPPHIRE MARTINI. AS ARRANGED BY ULLA DARNI.

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